‘SHE’S SO BUSY BEING FREE’

TOWARDS A MATERIAL-ANALYTICAL APPROACH TO JONI MITCHELL AND HER GUITAR

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ABSTRACT

Music analysis is a discipline borne of the 'explanation' of notated music of the Western Classical Tradition. Its approach to explanation, therefore, is best suited to music of that same tradition. When music-analytical tools are applied to Western popular music there is a tendency to focus upon (and give special value to) those dimensions that align with the Western Classical Tradition. This often leads to emphasis being placed upon abstract notions of form and a lack of engagement with concrete entities such as the materials used in music making.

This thesis will develop a materially-driven approach to the analysis of guitar music through a detailed discussion of the early work of Joni Mitchell, one of popular music's most innovative and influential guitarists. Mitchell's early guitar work is most distinctive for her approach to scordatura, or 'alternative tunings' – the act of importantly altering the materiality of the guitar thereby affecting its role in music making. The importance of scordatura is particularly evident in Mitchell's first studio album, *Song to a Seagull*, in part because of its homogeneity of instrumentation, and in part because of the wide range of different tunings employed.

This thesis does not argue that the traditional tools of music analysis should become redundant. It looks, instead, to bring traditional notions of form into dialogue with an appreciation of music's materiality. A sustained focus on the use of scordatura demonstrates the inextricability of scordatura from the content and effect of Mitchell's guitar parts, but these, in turn, need to be understood as interacting with more traditional dimensions of analysis such as the harmonic, textural, and timbral palette. Through a new awareness of music's materiality, viewed in accordance with the lens of Joni Mitchell's early guitar work, this thesis will help to open up new avenues in the analysis of popular music.

A NOTE ON PRESENTATION

Joni Mitchell's music presents a number of notational issues to which some non-standard solutions have been adopted. Therefore I include this clarifying note.

Additional chord tones are very prevalent in *Song to a Seagull* and Joni Mitchell's guitar style in general. Distinctions between them are still more important. For this reason I have made a clear distinction between 'add' and 'sus', the latter explicitly denoting the absence of a third. I have also tended to described harmonies with a second but no third as 'sus2', while in the cases where the third *is* present they are 'add9', in part because I feel it better describes the construction of these harmonies, and in part simply due to personal preference. All extensions, including 'sus' are placed in superscript in the main text. Where I have used roman numerals I have largely done so for the rhetorical purpose of indicating the difficulty of parsing Mitchell's harmonic language in terms of traditional tonal logic.

In the musical examples, all tablature, unless otherwise stated, assumes the tuning in which the song in question is played. Furthermore, small noteheads in staff notation denote stopped strings, while large ones denote open strings. I reiterate this in the text when it is particularly significant. Note also the use of the standard clef for guitar staff-notation, which is for the purposes of clear communication to any guitar-playing readers, and for general conformity.

I note also that I have followed, due to the content of this thesis, the author guidelines given by the Journal of Music Analysis, except with regard to the citation of various webpages in the bibliography, for which I have followed department guidelines where possible.

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A BRIEF OUTLINE

The guitar is inescapable in Joni Mitchell's *Song to a Seagull* (1968): it is almost never silent and it is usually the only means of accompaniment in play. The fact that the guitar is highly pervasive in Mitchell's early output is almost immediately apparent to the ear. It is not, however, a surface characteristic, but an outworking of fundamental processes and relationships within Mitchell's work. These are the relationships between her fingers and the strings and the tuning pegs. The manner in which Mitchell uses her guitar is not, then, a veneer, but solid hardwood. This corporeal interface of hands and breath, wood and strings, bone and steel, is what I might call, following Abbate, the drastic episteme of the musical activity at play.[1] It conditions the very possibilities of the act, and further still its tendencies: what is convenient and what is awkward, what is a stretch and what is simple. It is also not merely a framework within which a person operates because there is, in my view, a profound reciprocity to such a relationship. This is a reciprocity which the comments and habits of a number of performing musicians imply, as I will show.

The central tenet of this thesis is that the musical instrument is not a mediator between 'musician' and 'music' but a palpable agent in the generation of the latter. It would at first seem appropriate to speak in terms of *affordances* here, but I will avoid it, and will therefore justify this terminological decision from the outset. Andrea Scarantino gives a useful summary of the original psychological concept for this purpose.

[1] By this I wish to stress the import of what Abbate (2003, p. 506) describes as the 'material, present event', by focusing on which an 'actual live performance' may become 'an object of absorption'. In short, rather than following Kerman (1985, pp. 113–54) in 'transcending the quotidian' by ignoring performances and practicalities, I wish to embrace the conditioning factors of the physical acts of music-making, and in particular those of instruments.

> The affordances of the environment, Gibson suggested, are the offerings of the environment, roughly the sets of threats (negative affordances) and promises (positive affordances) that characterise items in the environment relative to organisms
>
> (Scarantino 2003, p. 950)

Scarantino goes on to highlight the goal that Gibson (1979, in Scarantino 2003) had in his sights when coining the term, namely to 'capture what he took to be the essential *complementarity* between organisms and environment' (Scarantino 2003, p. 950). While complementarity of player and instrument is certainly at the heart of my project, I do not believe the sort of complementarity at the heart of Gibson's project, and ecological psychology in general, to be entirely the same as the instrument-player paradigm.

The slight incompatibility between affordances and my project is most readily to be found in the 'characteristic linguistic construct' used 'to refer to affordances, namely, *[verb phrase]-able'* (Ibid.). There is an underlying connection between this formulation and the *possible* and therefore the *impossible*. This is, in the case of my project, too much of a binary line to draw. The instrumental influences with which I am concerned are more akin to the optimal uses of tools. If one wishes to cut a small tomato, it is better to use a serrated paring knife than a non-serrated one, but, if necessary, the non-serrated knife can accomplish the task, with some modifications to the process. One might have to pierce the skin with the point of the knife before cutting through it, rather than simply slicing. The result, when well-practiced, is almost the same, but one is both less likely to try it, and probably one would require more practice to reach the same level of proficiency and speed. In sum, I am dealing with encouragements, physically logical use-cases, rather than binary possibilities and

impossibilities. Therefore, I will steer clear of 'affordances' in the interests both of clarity and of subtlety.

It is also worth noting from the outset that I will not in the course of this thesis opine on whether these sorts of player-instrument relationships are unique to Mitchell, or indeed whether they are uncommonly prevalent in or relevant to her music. Rather, I will operate on the assumption, borne out by the volume of evidence collected, that these relationships are sufficiently integral (and prevalent) to her work as to warrant the sustained analysis which forms the main body of this thesis.

There has been some, albeit limited, discussion in musicology of musical objects, be they humans, instruments, scores, advertisements, or indeed theatres, salons or vinyl records. The musicological approaches applied to these things, however, are not especially well aligned with musical *analysis*, suggesting the need for methodological innovation and a rethinking of music analytical tools. In developing such tools a useful principle is to recognise that in engaging with the instrument-as-object in the analysis of music one must engage with that object in its fullest sense. Some things can, however, be gleaned from pre-existing musicological engagements with the objects of music. Therefore, I shall survey such musicology as exists which may provide insights into the tool in question, the guitar, and its material multivalence, a multivalence which is to be found in its being-played, its being-tuned its being-seen, its being-sold, its being-desired.[2] The guitar accrues inseparably and irrevocably (for the historian) sedimented layers of 'meanings and interpretations' through its many 'careers' and 'trajectories' (Woodward 2007, p. 24). All this to say, the guitar is too significant a cultural object for something approximating a survey of its 'social life' (Appadurai 1986) to be avoided. A survey of pre-existing engagement with the materiality (however narrowly construed) of musical instruments in the context of

[2] This is tuning which is engaged in deliberately, as a choice of aesthetic convenience, that is, at an intersection between performance, composition, arranging, sonority et al.

music analysis is an essential initial step. This leads one towards a discipline in which the above-quoted Woodward and Appadurai have some pre-eminence, that of Material Culture Studies. A discussion of this discipline's relevance, and some more large-scale observations on the macrocosmic cultural positioning of the guitar, are to be found in Chapter 1a.

The second portion of the review of literature, Chapter 1b, consists of a discussion of more philosophically-centred engagements with the physicality of music, and a brief survey of analytical writing on Mitchell's music, with a focus on how much richer an analytical understanding can be gleaned by foregrounding scordatura.[3]

The cultural complexities of Mitchell's relationship with her guitar are broadened substantially by the manner of her actual, physical relationship with her guitar, a relationship as personal as a musician can possibly partake in. Mitchell's playing style is inseparably tied to altered-tunings (henceforth scordatura) and a highly idiosyncratic textural stratification, a style which Anne Karppinen has described thus:

> [T]he basis of what Mitchell calls her "orchestral thinking" is already evident: the lower three strings are not only the rhythm and bass platform, they also provide their own melody lines underneath the shimmering notes of the treble strings
>
> (Karppinen 2016, p. 53)

Scordatura is a practice which even beyond popular music studies has limited analytical coverage, although it is not entirely without good exploration. This analytical

[3] The New Grove (https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.41698) article on scordatura begins thus: 'A term applied largely to lutes, guitars, viols and the violin family to designate a tuning other than the normal, established one. Scordatura was first introduced early in the 16th century and enjoyed a particular vogue between 1600 and 1750. It offered novel colours, timbres and sonorities, alternative harmonic possibilities and, in some cases, extension of an instrument's range. It could also assist in imitating other instruments, and facilitate the execution of whole compositions or make possible various passages involving wide intervals, intricate string crossing or unconventional double stopping.'

paucity, it seems to me, does not accord with the importance of the phenomenon. In Mitchell's physically distinctive playing style resides not only cultural implications, but significant, embodied, acutely physical and material ones. This is the sense in which Mitchell's relationship with her instrument is not merely one of instrumentality, not merely one of mediation. If it were, it would not truly be a 'relationship'. Instead it is a relationship of mutuality, a relationship in which feedback is possible and indeed inevitable, a relationship in which the instrument suggests and permits, in which these suggestions, these nudges and permissions, carry huge weight. Thus, Chapter 1c is devoted entirely to the practice, from a historical perspective and then a contemporary one. In sum, Chapter 1 engages with a variety of angles previously taken towards the physical aspects of music and musicality. The central body of the thesis is comprised of analyses of songs from *Song to a Seagull* in a manner that places scordatura centre stage.

CHAPTER ONE

(1) THE CONNOTATIVE PROPERTIES OF THE GUITAR

The cultural placement of Mitchell's guitar-toting image is inescapable, especially where her early recordings are concerned. This goes beyond simply observing that Mitchell plays a Martin Dreadnought guitar and that this has many cultural signifiers of 20th-century Americana and "roots" music.[4] The field of relations here is complex, consisting of music, musician, instrument and wider processes of influence and control. In discussing some examples of studies into the guitar's large-scale cultural connotations and material weight, it is my objective to illustrate the mutability and instability of the cultural positions that Mitchell and her instrument necessarily occupy. Through this I wish to illustrate the relative difficulty of incorporating signifiers and cultural implications from the guitar she is playing into an analysis of Mitchell's music.

Three apposite examples of studies into the cultural importance of guitars are Robert Walser's 1993 study of metal guitar virtuosi in *Running with the Devil*, Steve Waksman's *Instruments of Desire* (1999) and a 2013 themed issue of *Ethnomusicology Forum* whose introductory article provides a good summary of material culture trends in music studies related to the guitar in addition to other sociological approaches (Dawe 2013). The variety of these examples, about each of which I will give some measure of detail in the foregoing, is illustrative of the very mutability which gives the analyst cause for concern and just impediment to pause for thought: if I am to assign to Mitchell a particular type of guitar, it is essential that I choose the *right* guitar, for

[4] The Dreadnought style of guitar was developed by the C.F Martin company in the early 20th century, and is distinguished by its large size and squared off shoulders and bottom.

they are not all created equal, in both a physical and a cultural sense. Mitchell does not play a bright pink Jackson Dinky or a Charvel or an Ibanez JEM: these are worlds apart from her guitar.[5]

Above I have implied that 'the guitar' is far too nebulous a concept to possess only one set of cultural signifiers, only one set of implications. It has been, for example, the focal point, for the shred-guitar doyens of hair-metal in their quest to appropriate eighteenth and nineteenth century Western Classical music (particularly Bach and Vivaldi) to their own ends and 'legitimate popular culture by applying the standards of 'high' culture' and thereby gain 'virtuosity, theory, and prestige' (Walser 1993, pp. 58-9). There are questions of masculinity arising from this too, due to the point that the guitar can easily be viewed as a semi-literal weapon, the term 'axe' being far from accidental.[6] Weapon or not, the guitar is the totem or perhaps even the key in this near-mystical context. This is, in many ways, the crux of Walser's book. For Walser, and in the context of his heavy-metal topic, the 'axe' is the spile with which the heady keg of 'high-culture' (read: Classical, moneyed, *elite*) signification may be tapped. It is the instrument of some measure of violence, the imposition of highly individual will by means of skills and knowledge long-guarded by a financial/cultural elite. Consider for a moment Paul Gilbert playing Bach Partitas, Yngwie Malmsteen or Uli Jon Roth doing the same, or even the litany of shred guitarists playing Rimsky-Korsakov's 'Flight of the Bumblebee' at unseemly and incomprehensible tempi. These performances, consciously related as they are to the Western Classical Tradition and its ideas of virtuosity, of competency, and of *good music*, provide useful insight into both the mutability of the guitar and the value they wish to derive from the Western Canon. This is all made possible by this radical newness and deliberate roughness which the electric

[5] This latter the signature model of former Zappa and David Lee Roth sideman and noted virtuoso Steve Vai.

[6] Walser does indeed delve into some of these questions, and I leave this to him: my purpose here is simply to illustrate some of the identity-forming possibilities of musical instruments.

guitar came quickly to possess, through its technological novelty, association with mass manufacturing, and the capacity it quickly developed for its sounds to be manipulated into vulgarity and aggression, chaos and disaffection.

In some significant measure of contrast, however, the (more universally remunerative, 'mainstream') electric guitar boom of the 1960s was one in which the fact that the instrument became 'an object invested with deep significance among certain segments of the pop music audience' (Waksman 1999, p. 2) had radically different ramifications. Waksman goes on to describe the electric guitar as a 'commodity in its own right' whose integral position in the pop music, which was the 'best vehicle' for its promotion, led, aside from the occasionally-realised 'boy with his guitar' dreams of rock'n'roll avarice, to a cultural position that was not 'strictly economic, but that had to do with a different kind of investment' (Waksman 1999, p. 3). These boy-with-his-guitar dreams are, however, the starting point for much of this cultural investment, largely springing from the demotic potential of the instrument. Fast-forwarding, one might ask the question: does punk happen without the electric guitar? Does grunge, or britpop? Do we have a Soundgarden, a Nirvana, a Sex Pistols, in a world without the electric guitar? These styles and their inseparable cultural movements are almost entirely enabled by both the guitar 'itself' and the sound it makes and its potential for a rebellious image. It is hard to imagine replacing the word guitar with, say, a flute, in the title of 'Anyone Can Play Guitar' (Radiohead 1993, track 6). These examples illustrate both the mutability and the power of 'the guitar' as a cultural object and a popular idea, operating across domains with at times mutually exclusive sets of quality/authenticity parameters.[7]

[7] Consider the valorisation of not knowing many chords in punk and Britpop circles and compare it to the Vivaldi-drenched 4-hour practice sessions and guitar-workout DVDs of Paul Gilbert and others. These things have, aside from the guitar, only the goal of the expression of masculinity in common.

Walser and Waksman's examples of the cultural mutability of the guitar are both largely Western and concerned almost exclusively with the electric guitar. Guitars in general have also come under the microscope in their quite extraordinary prevalence in many and varied cultures around the world. Such prevalence is partially due to the their physical characteristics: 'portable, rugged, versatile, and relatively easy to construct' (Eyre 2003, p. 44) the guitar possesses a very great degree of exportability. This has even come to the point where, according to Cynthia Schmidt, the guitar has taken up a role as 'a symbol of national identity in various African countries' (Schmidt 1994, p. 5). Because the guitar is a highly exportable, highly mutable and varied instrument, it has a most noteworthy cultural shapeshifting ability. This cultural shapeshifting is rendered far more visible by the guitar's other main characteristic: it is not very difficult to play the guitar well enough for people to enjoy it – the skills required to strum away beside a campfire, for example, are remarkably small. Hence the prevalence of the acoustic guitar player at social gatherings of a wide range of kinds. The guitar is easy to build, easy to vary, easy to carry, and easy to play *well enough*. It is, furthermore, a harmonic instrument, which means that it is well-suited to the simple, portable accompaniment of a singing human voice. For this litany of reasons, it is everywhere. Having illustrated the chameleon qualities of the guitar, some attempt at a pinning-down is needed to be able to answer the quite fundamental question of what sort of cultural object Joni Mitchell's guitar is, and to what extent this can be brought to bear on an analysis of the music made with it.

What guitar does Joni Mitchell play? There are a variety of answers to this question. Even a literal answer is not uncomplicated. Throughout her long career, Mitchell has played a wide variety of individual guitars, made by an equally broad spectrum of brands. A particular answer, relevant to her studio debut, *Song to a Seagull* (1968), would be that she played a 1956 Martin D-28 Dreadnought steel-string

acoustic guitar. This answer, however, is simply a useful starting-point. The fact that it is a Martin is not without import. C.F Martin & Company have been a lynchpin of American instrument manufacture since the business was founded in 1833, and are the company credited with the introduction of the Dreadnought style of instrument. In general, the North American guitar took a slightly circuitous route to the folk traditions Mitchell was originally associated with, and in whose cultural orbit she certainly remained as a musician early on in her career. I will trace briefly this path drawing on Jeffrey Noonan's *The Guitar in America* (2008).

As Noonan has it, by the mid-twentieth century (and crucially the 60s), the instrument was in such a position as to be described as 'a tool of the folk, its repertoire an oral tradition, its heroes and heroines unschooled troubadours who use their instruments… to fight fascism, as well as racism, sexism, colonialism, and commercialism' (Noonan 2008, p. 3). It is Noonan's argument that the anachronistic projection of such a (disputable) cultural identity is not quite accurate, and the anachronistic projection upon the 19th-century guitar of a late-century *praxis* still more so. 'Steel stringing, a plectrum technique, and a lack of formal notation' (Noonan, 2008, p. 4) are less integrally 'folk' (by which one ought to read 'American') than general public perception would have it. It even emerges from Noonan's introduction that the development of electric jazz guitars in the 1920s may have influenced the performance practice of the acoustic steel-strung instrument in a more band-centric direction, *away* from the basically European origins of the guitar in North America, in which the instrument was 'not a tool of the folk, but … a cultivated instrument with roots in Europe's courts and salons' (Noonan 2008, p. 5). Noonan's basic thrust is that the 'folk' image of the steel-strung guitar (itself invented in the mid-to-late nineteenth-century) arose after the nylon-strung 'classical' instrument was eclipsed by the 'mass-produced piano' and was then revived (with brighter, louder,

more forceful tone) in a way through the banjo, mandolin and guitar movement and its 'plectral orchestras' (Noonan 2008, p. 5). By the time Mitchell began performing in the 1960s the acoustic guitar had gained associations with a quite extraordinary variety of different musicians, as broadly-spread as Robert Johnson, Bob Dylan, Joan Baez and Pete Seeger.

These musicians, loosely, all tapped into a semi-traditional aesthetic, one quite bound up in notions and questions of American 'national' identity. Many of them, Dylan and Seeger in particular, were often concerned with musical protest. The *locus classicus* of this is Dylan's "Blowin' In The Wind" (1963), a song which paraphrased a far older song, "No More Auction Block" which is better known as "We Shall Overcome". The song even deploys Biblical rhetoric (from Ezekiel) in a heavily vernacular fashion (Gray 2006, p. 63-4), and in 1975 (to some rather telling local consternation) replaced some Shakespeare on a Sri Lankan school syllabus (Samaranayake 2004, p. 12-19). This sort of pervasiveness, politicisation, and cultural complexity is noted largely to illustrate the milieu in which Mitchell's early work came to the fore.

I illustrate this milieu and then-nascent tradition largely to note Mitchell's extreme individuality within it. The songs of *Song to a Seagull* are not protests, save for some environmentalist and anti-urbanist lines in 'Nathan la Franeer' (Mitchell 1968, 5) or the title track (Ibid, 9). Even then, they are not 'protest songs' in style. They are not strummed, militant, chanted, or even especially much like 'folksongs'. They are varied in form, though they are often strophic. Further, there is a distinct absence of ballad-style quatrains. All this is in addition to the intricately stratified textures of the guitar parts on *Song to a Seagull* which have very little in common with the style in which Mitchell played pre-existing folk songs in what little of her early performing career is available on record. Examples of this may be found on the archival disk *Joni*

Mitchell Archives – Vol. 1: The Early Years (1963–1967) (Mitchell, 2020). Moreover, 'folk' as a genre even in the latter half of the 1960s was hardly homogenous. Something that can encompass such disparate styles of guitar-playing as bluegrass flat-picking and the strumming of Pete Seeger cannot possess a stable enough set of tropes and associated implications to impart a great deal of *meaning* to the guitar part of a song that bears few structural similarities, either lyrical or musical, with 'a folksong'.

(2) MATERIAL CULTURE STUDIES

The discipline of Material Culture Studies (MCS) is based on the observation that, as Ian Woodward puts it, 'objects have the ability to signify things – or establish social meanings – on behalf of people, or do 'social work'' (Woodward 2007, p. 3). Woodward also points out a difficulty and risk inherent in the discipline. Overly-detailed analysis (in particular of the symbolic meanings of objects) can become in some sense deterministic, 'uncomplicated by the idiosyncracies, incoherencies and sheer mundanity of the user's perspective' (Ibid.). MCS has been applied extensively as a theoretical framework to musical objects other than the guitar, and indeed to musical objects other than instruments. A large proportion of this application has been to the objects of musical dissemination. Routledge's series of publications on Music and Material Culture is indeed predominantly concerned with *inscription*, be that the three volumes concerned with early printed music and interactions with it, or a volume on *New Perspectives on Musical Inscription* (Schuiling & Payne 2022). Other kinds of inscription gather some interest, too, most notably the physical recorded media used to distribute records which are the subject of Elodie A. Roy's *Media, Materiality and Memory: Grounding the Groove* (2015). These kinds of objects are unsurprising in their prevalence in musical MCS. An example might follow approximately these lines: a 17th-century printed volume full of annotations is the kind of object which lends itself extraordinarily well to MCS practices. An underlined syllable in a psalm or a circled note in a part-book might provide valuable insight into the performance practices of people long dead, of whose active music-making we have otherwise only anecdotal or descriptive evidence. A record collection is an extremely personal thing, too. A gift-note, a receipt, or even the condition of the records and their sleeves might provide all manner of information about the buyer, or indeed seller, of records. Some have gone

so far as to ascribe a historiographical aspect to the discussion of record collections, using the term 'historio*phono*graphy' (Poole 2014, 8, in Roy 2016). Judy Attfield describes the discipline, with regard mostly to post-War popular design, as a 'way of looking at a non-verbal manifestation of how people make sense of the world through the use of objects' (2007, p. 135). This is quite applicable to the attitude at play in musicological applications of MCS, resting on the idea of 'things as being mediators or vehicles between the mental and the material, between the self and what lies beyond the body' (Ibid.). A piece of recorded music on physical media such as a vinyl record or a cassette tape is perfectly in line with this view.

If MCS is easily summed up in the manner posited by Attfield, then we may view the objects, be they chairs, vases, or vinyl records, as a *lens.* In Elodie A. Roy's book, the lens is the act of studying the physical objects of the *dissemination* of music, mostly from the perspective of elective, constructed and 'controlled ventures… animated by the rather modernist idea of creating a coherent and *legible* body of work through the act of releasing and curating records' (Roy 2015, int.). This is a rather macrocosmic form of MCS, though, a study whose case-studies are the business practices of three small record labels. The number of objects in question, small though the labels are, is in the thousands. MCS also operates on a far closer field of study, even to the level of individual objects, such as the Little Hulei lute which J.T Zeitlin (2009) has chronicled in an article tracing the history of an eighth-century instrument through to the twenty-first. Zeitlin's article works 'not to consider a class of things, but, through a single case study, to follow the trajectory of an extraordinary object and explore the successive layering of its identity as it moves from person to person and place to place' (Zeitlin 2009, p. 395). This thesis statement encapsulates quite thoroughly the goals of MCS and embraces its potential to trace what Koptyff (1986)

calls the 'cultural biography' of an object. Yet, a cultural biography of an object, if it is anything like a biography of a person, must be multi-faceted. As Koptyff has it:

> We accept that every person has many biographies psychological, professional, political, familial, economic and so forth - each of which selects some aspects of the life history and discards others. Biographies of things cannot but be similarly partial.
>
> (1986, p. 68)

So, the musical object, like a person, has many faces. This is true most explicitly of the musical instrument, whose primary face cannot help but be their designed use. Instruments are tools, after all. Yet, MCS analyses of musical objects, even when discussing instruments, do not have much at all to do with the physical *use* of instruments. Zeitlin's lute is impossibly ornate, a status item, and has largely sat in museums and private collections for over a millennium. The only explicitly cultural-organological volume in the Routledge series, on English Viols, (Fleming & Bryan 2016) is primarily aimed at the collation of enough case-study detail to provide major assistance in the production of historically accurate copies of these instruments. The goal is stated in as many words in the introduction, wherein the two core questions posed are 'what are the characteristics of sixteenth-century English viols, and what do today's makers need to know in order to produce instruments that closely resemble sixteenth-century English viols?' (Ibid.) The focus of this, then, is what might be learnt about particular instruments through historical organology. The authors note, indeed, that 'the repertory played on viols may yield significant insights into some of the instruments' characteristics' (Ibid: 35). The concern is with the ranges of individual

viols and what compass was commonly written in for each type. This lies on the fringes of the composition-instrumental paradigm but does not quite approach it head-on.

What MCS has to say, in brief, is that objects provide the key to a profound understanding of humans, and that they do this through telling us how we relate to them. These material manifestations and drivers of culture can be placed in the foreground of thought with great benefits. Certainly there are obstacles to this sort of thought, which, in a historical sense, might be encapsulated thus:

> Acknowledgement of objects has not come easy. Behind the reticence to examine objects as centrepieces of emotional life was perhaps the sense that one was studying materialism, disparaged as excess, or fetishism, disparaged as perversion. Behind the reticence to examine objects as centrepieces of thought was the value placed, at least within the Western tradition, on formal, propositional ways of knowing.
>
> (Turkle 2007, p. 6)

Musical events collect objects. Indeed, musical *verbs* surround themselves with musical *nouns*. Musical activities function as a focus for the grouping of socially-identifying objects (and indeed activities) in a profound fashion. Fashion, indeed, is perhaps the most obvious example of this aside from musical instruments themselves. Music is so bound up in various kinds of object-mediated performance that the idea of 'aesthetic choice' being 'so thoroughly learnt and ingrained that… markers are expressed in the body, self-presentation and performance' (Woodward 2007, p. 6) is crucial. These performances are not by any means confined to traditional definitions of a performance, where there is a performing individual or group in an explicit performer-audience relationship. Often these performances are purchases, collections,

the clothes we wear, the records we buy, the records we *don't* buy. These are elements which contribute to the status quo observed by Roy, that 'material culture preserves itself as long as it is readable and accessible' (2016). Consider the listener, the avid fan, of a particular artist or style. Tribalistic tendencies around popular music consumption-choices which are writ large, in particular, at a sartorial level, in particular in the twentieth century. There is a *visual* image, or at the very least a set of images, of a person that appears in our brains when we think about a 'metalhead' or an 'opera buff', a 'mod' or a 'rocker'. These choices are profound, for some life-changing, and all this before we even consider the 'performer' in the traditional sense of the word. The performer of a particular style is just as subject to the multifarious materialities of musical instruments and their users as listeners are. Upon the introduction of their physical-productive interactions with other humans and with their equipment, this becomes perhaps even more true. In brief, the cultural facets of musical activity are quite easily viewed in terms of their materiality, from band T-shirts to artist endorsements to vinyl record hunting to strumming a guitar.

Musical instruments are, admittedly, particularly complex. MCS might initially be brought to bear on the guitar by considering the instrument (especially in its playing) a social marker. At a very small-scale level if I have a guitar on a stand in my home I am presenting something. Its particular characteristics might well have *aesthetic loading*. Should I possess a guitar resembling Willie Nelson's famous 'Trigger' (an instrument famous for, amongst other things, the extraordinary extent of its dilapidation) things may be assumed about me. If I possess on the other hand a gleaming example of modern British or American luthiery by Paul Reed Smith or Patrick James Eggle, quite a different set of assumptions may ensue. In the former case it is possible that either a lack of care for my instrument or an enthusiasm for roots-Americana will be the impression. I suspect that in some minds these two probable

assumptions are not unconnected. In the latter, I am likely to be assumed either to be some sort of virtuoso, some sort of connoisseur, or simply very rich.[8] All of these likely assumptions basically arise from two possible states of my instrument: 'beat-up' or 'shiny and expensive-looking'. These are observations not necessarily contingent on much knowledge of guitars and guitarists, but rather on simple responses to 'dirty' and 'shiny', analogous to a dusty pile of books on a boot-rack or a kitchen work-top covered in flour and egg-white, as opposed to a meticulous shelf of volumes and a spotless marble counter. In contrast to this kind of close-up view, I propose the cover of the Dire Strait's album *Brothers in Arms ,* which features a National resonator guitar on a field of blue skies. This album cover is a prime example of the type-heavy nature of MCS observations in the sphere of musical objects. *Brothers in Arms* (1985) is an album largely about freedom, brotherhood, loneliness, independence. So, the cover features the archetypal sigil of American roots music, the National. This explicit association is exploited elsewhere in the popular music of the late 1980s, through textual reference, in the title track of Paul Simon's *Graceland* (1986), which opens with the line: 'the Mississippi Delta - was shining like a National guitar'. The effect in both of these cases is to evoke *America*. This relies on the National, as a 'type', having accrued a set of meanings and signifying properties, largely by virtue of the previous associations of other 'particulars', i.e other National guitars, and resonators more generally.[9] These associations with Roots-Americana arose from several sources, most notably from extensive use in Mississippi and Louisiana 'Delta Blues' music from the 1920s onwards. This use seems to have arisen, at least in part, from the amplifying

[8] This would hardly be new in the history of musical instruments. Prestige has been garnered through ornate decoration or technological complexity as a matter of course, from High Baroque flute-playing automata to the intricate marquetry of certain special edition Bösendorfer concert pianos to Yuriy Shishkov's Swarovski-Crystal Fender Stratocaster. Even to have a grand piano is a fairly significant social statement after all.

[9] I avoid the use of 'token' here, as it runs the risk of obscuring my point: the use of 'token' can imply that the characteristics of the 'token' proceed from the 'type', rather than that the 'type' is formed from the mass of 'particulars' behaving in similar ways.

characteristics of the resonator design. What must be gleaned here is that the 'type' of instrument accrues meaning through the use of its individual 'particulars' toward particular musical ends in particular musical contexts. Yet, as can be seen from the National, these associations rely, at least in part, on *functional success* (actually being used as instruments) in order to have time to develop.

This brings me at last to the relations which are the heart of this thesis, those of instruments with people. The ways in which types of instruments relate to or socialise with *many* people are less subtle than the ways in which particular instruments might relate to *one* person. So, type-level complexities of the musical instrument's social position can be highly multivalent, but so too can the particular-level complexities of a particular instrument and a particular individual. Consider Glenn Gould's astonishingly exacting, nigh-obsessive, requirements for Bach at the piano:

> [I] fixed the action in some of the instruments I play on—and the piano I use for all recordings is now so fixed—so that it is a shallower and more responsive action than the standard. It tends to have a mechanism which is rather like an automobile without power steering: you are in control and not it; it doesn't drive you, you drive it. This is the secret of doing Bach on the piano at all. You must have that immediacy of response, that control over fine definitions of things.
>
> (Stegemann 1993a)

Such exactitude, which in Gould's case tends to be viewed as a product of his perceived oddness, is far from uncommon. Musicians of some fame are frequently associated with very particular instruments, especially in the guitar sphere, from Eric Clapton's litany of named Stratocasters to the aforementioned 'Trigger' to B.B. King's 'Lucille' to Brian May's homemade 'Red Special'. Fame includes the instruments even

to the extent that the 'signature model' is a tentpole of the guitar manufacturing industry. There is a partially misguided but rather telling belief in the importance of exacting gear specifications in accordance with those of one's guitar heroes. As I wrote this sentence an advert for just such a model entered my email inbox, an email the like of which I receive daily. An example: Brian May built a guitar with his father at the age of seventeen, and plays that guitar always with a coin. It is part of his image as a rock-star. The guitar is a one-off, the product of trial-and-error by people who would never even profess to be 'luthiers'. The instrument is exclusively identified with May and with Queen in general, both sonically and visually. Judging by the fact that he only plays the original or copies of it on Queen revival tours, Brian May appears to acknowledge this importance. There is a personal relationship that musicians develop with their instruments even beyond the mountains of historical/associative meaning-accrual. Its effects on the perception of the instruments, the musician, and indeed 'the music' are very great.[10]

MCS in musicology skirts around the consideration of the use of musical instruments, but does not possess the tools to deal with this question. This is attitudinal in part. MCS, when concerned with musical objects and activities such as records, band-fashion, instrument manufacture and preservation, is rarely about

[10] At a slightly less specific level this phenomenon of personally and culturally tied-up gear 'mattering' may be observed in the Historically Informed Performance movement. Organological authenticity is an explicit prerequisite of authentic performance in the demesne of the professional HIP-ster. The most profound example, stretching beyond even HIP, may be the obsession with Stradivari violins. Perhaps signore Stradivari was a transcendental genius but in no other instrument is such a particular ancient gold standard to be found. There is of course a scarcity-economic factor at play akin to late-1950s Gibson Les Pauls, but I suspect the fact of the instrument's very *age* (borne out by the fact that, although Stradivari occupies a status-position akin to Rolls-Royce or Fabergé, other ancient artisans are available) is significant. It is not just the style that matters. There is a thought, and I have thought it myself, that this instrument *might have played* the music that is now canonical in its original context. It is a feeling which is amusingly fulfilling, in a slightly malicious way, to subvert: I recall being invited, aged seventeen, to play a fine harpsichord once owned by Georg Frideric Handel, and immediately playing the cadenza from the 5th Brandenburg Concerto of J.S.Bach. I was not the only one present who was amused by this. Place, time, ownership, history, material involvement, these are characteristics which objects possessed of semi-mediative *instrumentality* are inevitably likely to accrue over time in manifold layering, folded over and over, a strudel of performers and owners and makers and hearers. Perhaps we want the magic of some imagined and nameless Kapellmeister or indeed some very named virtuoso to rub off. Perhaps it is conditioning. Regardless, gear, being matter, matters.

'music' in the same way that musicology (and analysis in particular) is. This is in my view inevitable, and not at all an indictment of either discipline. Music is intangible, elapsing in time, through the air and in our heads. It is therefore an inappropriate object of study for a discipline concerned purportedly with *objects* because it is not an object in the same way that the objects of MCS are, as, physical though sound waves may be, they lack the persistent characteristics of those objects characteristically studied in MCS. In brief, musical events are not *things*.

The incompatibility might be further illustrated in the following manner. My survey of musicological MCS reveals three major points of focus within the discipline:

a) *a* person
b) *a* thing
c) 'society'

The discipline's goal is the discussion of (c) through the attitudes of (a) towards (b), based on the axiom that (c) has informed both the nature of (b) and the attitudes of (a). As an analyst of music, my triangle is different. My points of focus in analysing the product of the relationship of Joni Mitchell and her guitar are, instead these:

a) *a* person
b) *a* thing (an instrument in particular)
c) 'art'

There are two angles to explore here. The first is the consideration of what can be learnt about the relationship of (a) and (b) through its outworking in (c). This is essentially done in the transcriptions of the guitar parts to individual songs. The second

is the act of analysing (c) in light of the relationship of (a) and (b). With (c), in this case Joni Mitchell's album *Song to a Seagull,* as a primary focus of study, the goals are out of step with MCS. Thus, although keeping MCS engaged is crucial, this is not an MCS study. It remains an analysis, an analysis which acknowledges that these material/immaterial tensions are not necessarily 'soluble', and keeps them in play as a point of interest rather than an issue to be swept aside into a grey void between analysts of 'music' and analysts of 'the material cultures surrounding music'. I will return to discussion of this at the beginning of my actual analyses.

(3) SOME EMBODIED MUSICOLOGY

In the first two portions of this principal review of literature, I have engaged with the history of the guitar, its cultural connotations writ large, and with Material Culture Studies. There remain several topics to touch on before embarking on either the analysis proper or on a discussion of scordatura. The first part consists of a discussion of previous attempts at engaging the physical activities of music-making in musicology, and some of my own extensions of these ideas. The second topic is the extant academic writing on Joni Mitchell and her work. This address largely takes the form of a critique of some existing analytical literature on Mitchell's music.

Engagement with the physical aspects of musical activity is not a new idea. Some general theoretical groundworks have been laid in various sub-fields. Carolyn Abbate's *Music—Drastic or Gnostic?* (2004) and Christopher Small's *Musicking* (1998) both concern themselves with the physical quite explicitly. The entire discipline of performance studies is likewise concerned with the physical in key respects. Most of this work has limited applicability to this thesis, however. 'Performance studies' as a discipline is at least partially demarcated from 'note-heavy' forms of musicology by its very name, despite considerations of improvisation and performance-art being commonplace in the discipline. This is not (quite) a theoretical framework consistent with the analytical approach I am employing. Other musicological studies which engage with the physical in a committed fashion have also not approached it in a manner that is quite *analysis* in the way I wish to conduct it, but some of it is of use within the context of my approach, containing major philosophical and social insights which are of value to my project. There are a few kernels to be drawn out in particular. Abbate includes an insightful quotation from Vladimir Jankélévitch which provides something of a jumping-off point for the analyst:

> 'composing music, playing it, and singing it; or even hearing it in recreating it—are these not three modes of doing, three attitudes that are drastic, not gnostic, not of the hermeneutic order of knowledge?'
>
> (2003, p. 77)

Jankélévitch's rhetorical question inspires in me not an answer but another question, namely: *what is, in fact, the difference between composition and performance?* This is a question all too easily brushed aside in the realm of classical analysis because there is indeed a great difference, in fact we possess whole disciplinary organs in the 'establishment' to enforce it and widen its scope day by day. This total separation is not a universal, however appropriate it may be to the real practice of the Western Classical tradition where it is most pronounced.

An example may illustrate the somewhat constrictive function of a taxonomic view of musical activity. If I write a pop song slowly at the guitar, iterating and playing what I invent, a line at a time, finding what I feel is the 'next step' *by performing it* (regardless of the audience's being a voice memo application on my mobile telephone, my own ears, or a piece of paper on which to inscribe lyrics), where is the line between performance and composition? In writing this song I have not simply done 'composition' but also 'rehearsal' and also, I would argue, in some way 'performance'.[11] I have furthermore done 'listening', 'evaluating', perhaps even 'analysis', as well as 'practice' and possibly 'recording'. These words are not even as clear cut in a 'classical' context as is sometimes hoped - their applicability in clearly demarcated strata here rests on still weaker ground. One element that leaps out, in the

[11] For those troubled by the idea of a performance *sans* audience, I might suggest the modification of the word 'performance' here to 'proto-performance', on the grounds that this sort of activity does have an implicit *future* performance.

context of this thesis, is that the act has been influenced by the instrument I have written the song with - not simply in the sense of writing differently at the piano as opposed to with a guitar, but perhaps even influenced by the specific guitar I have written with.[12] I can verify from my own experience that songs written on, say, a friend's guitar, in idle moments when visiting them, might be awkward, inconvenient, dead-sounding even, when played on one of my own instruments upon returning home. This goes beyond the obvious distinctions between radically different forms of an instrumental family, beyond the difference between a nylon and a steel-string, beyond playing a twelve-string song on six strings or an electric part on an acoustic. These sorts of variations in 'rightness' or 'success' seem to arise even between different steel-strung guitars, or between electric guitars, between even different Fender Stratocasters. This point goes a long way towards explaining why rock stars carry so many guitars with them on tour.[13] Even the very act of songwriting (i.e. composition) is materially-bound.

There is a tacit awareness of the materiality of music making and the import of musical equipment in most spheres of musical activity. A very clear example, and one relevant to this thesis, is the existence of guitar 'gearhead' culture. This provides a mountain of evidence for the importance of an awareness of materiality in thought about guitar music. *Guitarist Magazine*, for example, is mostly about gear and a good deal of what isn't expressly about gear is about *how to use it* (how to set it up, how to select sounds to suit style, mood, song structure etc.). Electrical mediation notwithstanding, this evinces a deeply-held awareness of the materiality of guitar music

[12] This distinction, profound and obvious as it is, is one which would be quite essential to consider in expanding the work of this thesis to Mitchell's broader corpus. There is a substantial distinction in harmonic practice between guitar-songs and piano-songs. The *locus classicus* of this is 'Blue' (Mitchell, 1971: 5). This track , to my ear, evokes the piano stylings of McCoy Tyner, early Herbie Hancock, or Red Garland, Bill Evans and Wynton Kelly while playing with the Miles Davis Quintet, in the wide-spaced quasi-polychordal voicing. There is none of the *closeness* (timbrally or in terms of pitch) of the guitar-songs in these piano-songs, though there are a number of facets and approaches which are to some extent held in common between the two.

[13] For a litany of examples of this, I encourage the reader to visit the YouTube channel of Premier Guitar Magazine, and their Rig Rundown series in particular.

among guitar musicians. I wish therefore to stress that foregrounding an awareness of 'gear' is important if analysing music made by people for whom such an awareness is normal, as we may see among electric guitarists. I believe, furthermore, that it is a highly valuable consideration even when discussing music by musicians who are far from obsessive about equipment, as a result of the conditions, encouragements and possibilities which instruments impose on those that play them.

One trope in gear-fixation is the desire for it to disappear. 'Transparency' is the buzz word in the overdrive pedal market, for example. The Steinway piano company essentially markets itself on even-ness of tone, on clarity and purity of note, on their instruments being 'wonderfully balanced and versatile' (Steinway & Sons). These are concerned with *getting out of the way.* One side of this is understandable, laudable even: the versatility and controllability permit the musician to control and relate to the instrument with a greater degree of precision, a greater degree of exactitude and presumably this permits in some senses 'superior' performance. The other side is that the apotheosis of some kinds of material music equipment is to dematerialise, to be there-but-not-there, to be essentially a mediator, not to participate but to facilitate. In the case of the overdrive pedal the guitar itself has plenty of materiality left, because the whole design goal of most low-gain overdrive pedals is predicated on adding gain/ saturation without obliterating the sound of the 'guitar itself', to be transparent and to be a mediator. This seems incongruous, as it prejudices the materiality of one thing in favour of that of another. The important facet overlooked, though, is that the guitar is what you actually *touch*. This appears to be paramount, the direct physical interaction of humans and tools. An analogous phenomenon, stemming from the same place, was the trend towards skeumorphic elements in software design. The early iterations of Apple's iOS operating system featured designs for buttons and sliders, for app icons etc, which mimicked the 'real' versions of the tools they were providing. Email was a

letter with a seal. YouTube was an early cathode ray tube television. Notes were a jotting pad. The save button in many modern programs to this day resembles a floppy disk. In music production the phenomenon is still more extreme. Plug-ins frequently have graphics designed to resemble the physical gear they emulate, complete with dials, knobs, brushed chrome effects and swinging vU meters. This phenomenon is motivated, in short, by the goal of increased comprehensibility and usability, the theory being that the more something virtual mimics a real-world counterpart, the easier to understand it will be. The easier to understand a tool is, the easier it will be to *use*. This is far from a universal phenomenon, but it certainly seems to remain popular in the musical world in particular, and speaks to a fairly simple idea: the tools that one physically touches and uses are important to people.

It emerges from this discussion of gear that what matters still more than gear is how it is used. In the case of Joni Mitchell, this is paramount. Mitchell is among the more stylistically distinct guitarists of the twentieth century. By 'style', here, I refer not to some kind of complex system or premeditated structural design, but rather to her habits, the 'tropes' of the way she plays the guitar. She is also, incidentally, among the more stylistically distinct pianists, but that is not the concern of this thesis. Mitchell suffered as a child from polio, and this caused a measure of stiffness in her fingers which persisted well into later life. Karppinen is blunt in contending that 'the stiffness in her fingers would inspire her to find alternative ways to play the guitar' and that in 'her early career as a folksinger, Mitchell used simplified guitar tunings mostly to accommodate the more difficult chord changes for her "clumsy" left hand' and that, by association, 'many of her alternative tunings allow her to use mainly barre chords' (Karppinen 2016, p.33). I do not wish to insinuate that Mitchell's childhood illness is in a kind of deterministic sense the *cause* of her artistic output. What is more

productive in this case is the obvious potential of such autobiographical detail to illustrate the manner in which Mitchell relates to her instrument.

The social lives of objects include people: the social lives of people are made with objects. These complexities are such that they emerge fully-formed if one engages 'the guitar' as played by Joni Mitchell in good faith, and therefore emerge in analysis. How-it-is-played and how-it-was-written are not entirely distinct, and extant analytical vocabulary is hard-pressed to cope. Fortunately, some technical work has been done on scordatura at least, a survey of which is to be found early in this thesis.

(4) JONI MITCHELL IN THE ACADEMY

The extant literature on Joni Mitchell is varied in its foci. For such a cultural lodestone as Mitchell, this is hardly surprising. However, little of this scholarly work has been conducted in the field of music analysis. Rather, Mitchell scholarship has largely been advanced in the realms of literary, social and political criticism, hardly an unsurprising state of affairs, as Mitchell's lyrical qualities possess, depths and qualities to support far more study than they already have, from Tolkienesque pseudo-mythologies to utopianism to the profoundly confessional to the strikingly poetic. Amy Kintner's article 'Back to the garden again' (Kintner 2015) is a fine example of this: the article principally concerns itself with a single song, 'Woodstock', considering its reinterpretations and utopian political implications. Tom Gerry's 2011 article *"I Sing My Sorrow and I Paint My Joy"* is concerned similarly with spheres of scholarship distinct from my own, largely inter-medial relations. Anne Karppinen's 2016 book *The Songs of Joni Mitchell: Gender, performance and agency* (Karppinen 2016) is concerned with feminist theory, lyrical content, performance-studies, and reception history. Some analysis has been done in recent years, most notably (and substantially) Lloyd Whitesell's *The Music of Joni Mitchell* (2008). Some useful analytical articles are also to be found on Mitchell's work, namely Charles Ford's *Searching for ghosts* (2019), Charles Hartman's detailed analysis of (1977) 'Michael from Mountains' and Brian Lloyd's article, 'Gender, Magic, and Innovation' (2020).

There is nonetheless a lacuna in these volumes, one whose exploration is the subject of this thesis. This lacuna is that of the paramount importance of scordatura. Scordatura is acknowledged, certainly, but not treated in analysis as being compositionally integral, and certainly not in the way I suggest the importance of scordatura. Karppinen (2016) hints, at several points, at this importance, but declines

to explore it further, her concerns being with lyrical content and feminist theory in the main. The description she gives which I quote on page 4 (2016, p. 53) acknowledges the importance of tuning in Mitchell's guitar *arranging*, in that the shimmering quality of Mitchell's guitar work, emphasised here, is clearly a consequence of scordatura. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that the treble strings of the guitar will not 'shimmer' if they are all fretted, further emphasising the interdependence of style and tuning, as scordatura practices usually entail more extensive use of open (i.e. unstopped) strings. This maxim is still more true than normal in Mitchell's case. Karppinen also notes a process of chronological development in Mitchell's very early career:

> the tunings she began to develop turned increasingly idiosyncratic, becoming an inspiration for composition rather than mere simplification of technique; having to learn chord positions anew for every tuning allowed her also to come up with unusual harmonies.
>
> (Ibid, p.33-4)

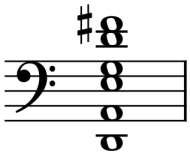
Karppinen acknowledges the centrality of guitar tuning in Mitchell's music, but largely leaves it aside, as it is not the focus of her study. Whitesell (2008), especially, covers much of the pitch-workings of Mitchell's music in an eminently effective and reasonable manner. However, the mechanism of the very plausibility of much of Joni Mitchell's output is left to a table of tunings in an appendix, and this is far from adequate consideration of the use of scordatura in Mitchell's guitar style.

The two main aims of this section hereafter are as follows, then. Firstly, to illustrate the various omissions and infelicities of a 'traditional' analytical approach to Mitchell's music. This illustration will be largely focused on the issues arising from the

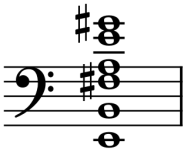
absence of instrumental considerations in the core methodology of such analyses. I will therein draw out some useful threads and in the same breath highlight some tendencies in Mitchell's relationship with her guitar. The second aim is slightly more straightforward. It is simply to characterise briefly the textual themes and moods of the album from a lyrical standpoint, song by song. Mitchell is, as far as this work is concerned, a *songwriter*, and this identity binds several things together: poetry and sound are as inextricable in 'her music' as are her body and her guitar.

My first example of the lacuna in extant analysis of Mitchell's music is a single chord. Ex.1.1 shows various versions of the closing chord of Sisotowbell' 'Lane (Mitchell 1968, 6). Whitesell (2008, p.130-1) presents this chord, comprised of D,A,E,G,D,F#, as an elision and superimposition of A^{7sus}, D^{sus2} and D chords. A jazz musician might simply label it as D^{add11}, with the ninth implied and the 'add' denoting the absence of a seventh. Certainly these sub-voicings are present in the chord. So too is an E minor seventh chord with an added ninth, over a D power-chord. Yet none of these seem to align precisely with the 'design' of this chord. Whitesell's superimpositions seem over-worked as a theoretical approach. Viewing it as a Dadd11 is also unsatisfactory, as that label is one for dominant harmonies, which this, in context, is most definitely not. Instead, one might use Mitchell's remark about 'chords of inquiry', which Mitchell herself considers 'comparable to the unresolved quality of much poetry' (Mitchell to McKenna 1988, in Whitesell 2008, p.119) as a starting-point. It is inherently unresolved, from the strictly tonal point of view, though diatonic to D. To describe it as coloristic might be close enough, yet to do so fails to characterise the timbral-harmonic interplay, to say nothing of the permissive/epistemic function of scordatura and style. Scordatura functions epistemically in the sense that it conditions likely instrumental acts: some chords are easier than others, so they are more likely than others. Yet this extends beyond harmony to arrangement, to picking

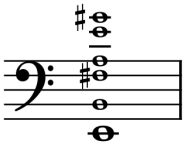
Ex.1.1.a - 1st possible voicing



Ex.1.1.b - 2nd possible voicing



Ex.1.1.c - 3rd



patterns, to the timbral qualities of each of these facets. In this sense it is, at least in this analysis, troubling that Whitesell *literally parenthesises* the means of its production when he writes of the 'last chord (produced by strumming open strings)' (Whitesell 2008, p.130). As a consequence Whitesell both acknowledges and simultaneously sidelines a central facet of Mitchell's (guitar) music.

Continuing with this most enigmatic of chords, I will illustrate what happens if one plays it in standard tuning. For the sake of ease, let us transpose it up a tone so we need not go lower than the lowest string of a standard-tuned guitar (Ex.1.1.b). We must therefore play a chord of {E,B,F#,A,E,G#}. To do so is technically possible, certainly, and I would propose a fretting of 024254 (see Ex.1.1.c) to accomplish it. Now consider the physical awkwardness of such a chord, and indeed the fact that it comprises five stopped notes as opposed to *none* (the latter shown in Ex.1.1.b). In Ex.1.1.c the stopped notes are small noteheads, the only open string denoted by a full-size notehead. There are several conclusions to be drawn about such a voicing. Firstly, it simply cannot produce the same sound when played thus. It may not be unpleasant, of course, but it will not be the same. The strings have different lengths, they are vibrating on nodes of different material (steel as opposed to bone at the fretboard end), and when fretted they are probably to some extent damped. The sustaining characteristics, too, will not be at all the same. This all leaves aside the very real chance that other parts of the song are entirely 'unplayable' by the reasonably competent player in the same registral distributions in 'standard' tuning. To conclude this image of the implausibility of such a chord in such prominence in 'standard', imagine how

one might decorate it, to remain in classical-analytical terminology a moment longer. An appoggiatura is largely out of the question without making a serious timbral (and visual) statement of one's own by 'tapping' simply because one has, in playing the chord, *run out of fingers* – the thumb does not help in fretting this chord.[14] This is illustrated in Ex.1.1.c: one has to barre the notes on the second fret and play the three other stopped notes with individual fingers, hardly conducive to comfortable additional ornamentation solely by means of the left hand. The open-tuned voicing, by contrast, is almost *designed* for decoration. The E and G strings admit an easy double hammer-on up to a D major chord. This gesture is the principal characteristic motif of the guitar part. The tuning employed in the song makes the hammer-on gesture with which the song begins very *convenient*.

I will give another example of previous analysis of Mitchell's music in the main body of this thesis, once some theoretical groundwork has been laid and some examples of my approach given, but at this point some clear trends are visible. Firstly, Mitchell's extraordinary influence on *songwriters* and the extent of her lyrical abilities have in my view led to a focus on her *texts*. Secondly, the clear complexity of her harmonic language may cause the analyst to foreground 'harmony' for its own sake: there is enough interest to sustain successful analysis from jazz or classical perspectives, as Lloyd's book demonstrates. I would therefore liken this thesis to a 'zooming-in', with an awareness of the instrumental concerns I have explored in section (3) of this review of literature, and will continue to discuss in sections (5) and (6).

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[14] Tapping is the use of the picking hand to produce notes not fretted by the fretting hand by the force of fretting them: essentially a picking-hand hammer-on. The most famous example of this technique is probably the opening of "Eruption" by Van Halen. It is itself yet another example of a facet of instrumental technique with significant visual/cultural/sonic connotations and intersection. Indeed, tapping and 'sweep-picking' have become the two touchstones of modern electric guitar virtuosity, aggregately governing the topos of the instrumental shibboleth. A 'proper' virtuoso must master both methods. Like all 'extended techniques' tapping is difficult to miss both from a purely sonic and from a visual standpoint.

(5) SCORDATURA THROUGH HISTORY

The literature on scordatura (the practice of playing with alternate tunings in stringed instruments) is fairly small. The analytical literature is far smaller still. Such paucity is largely because the practice, within the Western Classical Tradition, tends to be tied middle Baroque music and more recent experimental compositions. There is an exception in the form of certain later virtuosi whose compositional efforts have been historically branded as secondary and pursuant to their virtuoso status, most notably Paganini. These exceptions are themselves historically illustrative and I will return to them presently. Fortunately, some work has been done on the subject of scordatura which both helps to explain previous silences and dismissals and demonstrates some means of theorising scordatura's implications on compositions. This survey will consist of two main parts. Firstly, the history of scholarly and pedagogical thought about scordatura, followed by a survey of more current writings on the subject.

Daniel J Edgar's thesis (2008) on Biber (1644–1704) is of considerable importance in the history of scordatura, and includes some of analysis of scordatura music. The crux of this work is that 'scordatura is, in fact, fundamental to Biber's compositional language within the *Mystery Sonatas,* and that his method of deploying it reflects his Catholic, and specifically Jesuit, background' (Edgar 2008, p. 2). Edgar gives fairly detailed evidence of, and explanations for, the relative paucity of thought on the subject of scordatura. This begins with the rarity of the practice:

> Following Biber's death in 1704 scordatura seems to have faded from fashion in Germanic Europe, with only isolated examples occurring. The most famous of these are probably Johann Sebastian Bach's (1685-1750) Cello Suite no. 5 (BWV 1011), in which the cellist is required to lower the top string from an *a* to

> a *g*, and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's (1756-1791) Sinfonia Concertante (K 364) for violin and viola, in which the viola solo part utilises a transposition scordatura in order to match the brightness of the solo violin. Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767) also used the device in his *Concerto for Two Scordatura Violins and Continuo* (TWV 43:A2)
>
> (2008, p. 7)

Notably, these are works in which a measure of, if not *character*, then at least *use*, is derived from the altered tuning. In the case of the Mozart, it is even a question of balance and of magnification, the viola being tuned a semitone up to *Db Ab Eb Bb*: therefore the viola soloist 'plays the piece as if it were in D major whereas all the other performers play in Eb major. Therefore, the open strings provide a great deal more sympathetic resonance on the viola than they do for the violin soloist, meaning that Mozart is able to achieve a balance between the instruments that would otherwise have proved difficult' (Edgar 2008, p. 7). Edgar's point is valuable, as it encapsulates the first type of scordatura playing I wish to discuss, one that might be dubbed a utilitarian case. Altered tunings can make the instrument louder, brighter, more convenient for the professional (rather than simply 'easy')[15]. In short, no particular sound is desired, no patterns of notes made easier. Simply, the goal is to make the instrument louder, or at the very least seem louder through a greater emphasis on treble overtones produced through higher string tension.

This is not a phenomenon unique to the stringed instrument, either. A professional clarinettist may reasonably possess at least four clarinets of distinct pitches (A, Bb, C, Eb) all played in the same fashion with the same rough range. The

[15] To play the provocateur once more, is there much fundamental difference for the cellist between scordatura and altering the length of one's floor spike? Both require recalibration in playing approach, both alter aspects of one's performance.

distinction between these different versions of the instrument is very significant indeed. Take, for example, a performance of the finale of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony with Clarinets in Bb. High Cs are Ds to the player all of a sudden, an issue which seems entirely inconsequential unless one plays the clarinet and is able to note that the character of these notes is likely to be substantially different as the player's high C is the last note at the top of the conventional *clarino* prior to the *altissimo* portion of the instrument's range. Certainly a high D is not unplayable, indeed it presents few problems approached in a reasonable fashion to a player on the lower end of 'intermediate' standard, but less control is permitted, and one has altered the hole-pattern very high up the bore of the instrument. Another example of the generality of this phenomenon of the utilitarian (transposition) 'scordatura' is the A-Bb debate in Schumann's *Fantasiestücke,* Op.73. Parts for both kinds of clarinet were published fairly early on, and no clear resolution has ever been reached as to which is 'better'. Some passages of the piece are far more convenient, smoother-sounding, more 'free-blowing' on one type, some far more so on the other. To give still more extreme an example, one would not play the canonic E-flat clarinet solos in the Ravel Piano Concerto and the *Symphonie Fantastique* of Berlioz in the altissimo register of a B-flat or A instrument. It would present a multitude of issues to do so, to the point where it would not be recommended even if one had only a B-flat instrument. The absurdity of playing such a solo, perfectly 'possible' on the wrong sub-variety of the same instrument is predicated, then, on this pitch-timbre-convenience nexus of tuning. In short, tuning has major ramifications on a) timbre, b) ease of use and performance optimisation, and c) projection/loudness across multiple instrument families.

A second case of scordatura is also utilitarian but quite distinct, and takes place in the amateur environment. Holman (1993, p. 268) notes that:

> The violin's standard tuning in fifths is thought to have caused problems for English amateurs learning the instrument and, consequently, they frequently retuned it in ways with which they were more familiar: for instance. Anthony à Wood is known to have taught himself the violin by ear, 'tuning it in fourths like a viol'
>
> (in Edgar 2008, p. 8)

This is utility by ease-of-use, the viol being better known and more common in the period. There may even have been a measure of benefit to the ability to finger scales in three notes per string format all across the neck (this being impractical and undesirable in fifths tuning as it would require down-shifts in ascending scalar passagework) - it may have suited *young* English amateurs for this reason. This serves as an example of how scordatura is a means of altering an instrument to suit the skill-level and the physical characteristics of the players (such as small or very large hands), not simply altering the kinds of music which might be made with it.

A third use of scordatura appears to give rise to its demise. In continental Europe (specifically within Italian and German schools of playing), Edgar argues, it was 'reserved for 'masters' (Falck 1688, in Boyden 1965, p. 246, in Edgar 2008, p. 10) and thus in some measure associated with highly skilled performers. Indeed, Edgar's post-Vivaldi catalogue of scordaturists is something of a who's-who of 18th-and-19th century virtuosi, comprising 'Pietro Nardini, Giuseppe Tartini. Antonio Lolli, Pietro Castrucci, Emanuele Barbella and Bartolomeo Campagnoli'. All engaged in scordatura and continued 'a tradition which culminated with Nicolo Paganini (1782-1840)' (Edgar 2008, p. 10). What these musicians have in common beyond scordatura and virtuosity is that none, save Tartini and Paganini, are remembered truly as *composers* to any significant extent, and the two who are are remembered largely for

the virtuosity of their compositions (and in Paganini's case the simplicity of the 24th Caprice and its fecundity as a variations-theme). In this lies the fatal flaw in the reception of this practice: it is presumed to be but a trick. This sort of dismissal is employed even by such authorities on style and violin-playing as Quantz, whose 'criticisms of scordatura… appear to be rooted in an assumption that it is limited in its usefulness only to vacuous displays of technical wizardry' (Edgar 2008, p. 17). This association with falsehood and lack of substance correlates with the increasing prevalence of the 'work-concept' in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. If the work transcends the limitations of the instrument, how then can it be played 'properly' only in certain odd tunings? If it is really 'true' and exists outside physical constraints then how can it be so irrevocably tied to the instrument required to produce it? Scordatura gained a reputation much like that of computer-generated visual effects artists: impressive, complex, well-executed, but ultimately insubstantial.

Unlikely as it may seem, dismissals of Michael Bay and Niccolò Paganini may be of the same species, and bear resemblance to similar dismissals of Rossini and the other Bel Canto composers.[16] To exploit the malleability of the substance of one's tools is to risk being considered insubstantial. Especially in the case of Italian music, dismissals of virtuosity and its trappings as facile and lacking artistic integrity can be found all over Germanic and Anglophone musicology beginning as early as Wagner's early treatises, in the latter case with particular regard to the overwrought virtuosities of Italian opera (Wagner, 1851).

There are further reasons for scordatura neglect in the analytical and musicological literature. It is sometimes viewed, with reason, as a double-edged sword

[16] It has, in a peculiar analogue with (and opposition to) Mitchell, been proposed that Paganini himself had a medical reason for some portion of his style. In a 1978 article in the Journal of the American Medical Association it was proposed that Paganini 'owed his incomparable violin virtuosity to a fortuitous and fortunate coincidence of three factors: a soaring musical genius, a flair for the dramatic and ostentatious, and manual dexterity conferred by being born with the long fingers and hyperextensible joints of Marfan's syndrome'. (Schoenfeld, 1978: Abstract) Tendentious genius-narrative musicology aside, this provides yet another example of the conspicuous audibility of bodies in their transgression (and surpassing) of norms.

even from a practical standpoint. D.D Boyden (1981, p. 57) lists in addition to the association with virtuosic trickery the following issues:

> 'The instrument's range is lessened.
> A special notation and playing rules have to be observed.
> It is difficult to keep the instrument in tune.
> The instrument loses its characteristic sound.
> If more than one scordatura is used in a performance more than one violin must be used.'
>
> (in Edgar 2008, p. 18)

This is echoed by Goebel's (2004, p. 6) comments.

> 'a modern steel *e* string sounds at best like a pair of braces when tuned down to a *d,* while a modem g string would cause the instrument to shatter if tuned up to *a, b* flat or *b.*'
>
> (in Edgar 2008, p. 20)

Harwood (in Haynes 2002, pp. xxxix-xl) posits a similar view.

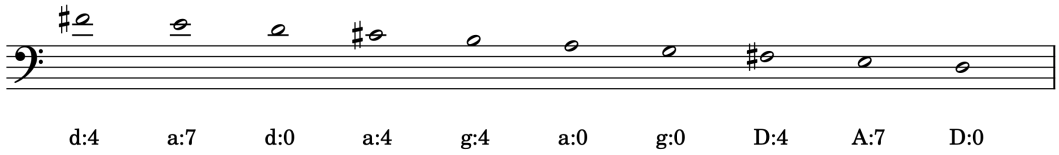
> 'Tuning any [string instrument] too high. or... too low is like condemning a tenor singer for ever to sing alto or bass parts. No one would expect him to be able to do either without strain. But we do it constantly to instruments with never a raised eyebrow. Yet the pitch of a stringed instrument is perhaps the most important single factor in determining the way it sounds. which in turn affects the sonority of the music it plays.'

(in Edgar 2008, pp. 46-7)

These are very significant issues, especially in bowed-string playing, and are perhaps part of the reason that scordatura became in some parts of Europe so much the preserve of the virtuoso. It is hard enough to play the violin beautifully when it is working 'properly': strings which constantly detune or wobble mid-note, mid bow-stroke, are issues the amateur is unlikely to put up with. This list of historical reasons for the paucity of scordatura-thought is very significant in illustrating the value of this nascent research area opened up by Edgar.

There are two significant (intertwined) emergent considerations which reside in these condemnations. The first is a clear awareness of some of the more surface-level manifestations of the influence of the instrument on playing style, on playing possibilities and on performance at large. In particular, Boyden's comments that a 'special notation and playing rules have to be observed' and that 'the instrument loses its characteristic sound' (Boyden 1981, p. 57) speak to particularly significant characteristics of scordatura which do not necessarily need to be viewed as problems. To lose a characteristic sound does not disallow the possibility of a distinct and differentiated one being gained, regardless of its inconvenience. Furthermore, what are the preponderant pedals and bell-like ringing basses of folk guitar (solo in particular) but 'special… playing rules' for a characteristic sound? For example, in DADGAD guitar tuning (pronounced 'Dad-gad'), there is a method, which I illustrate in Ex.1.2, by which one may play a descending scale a full tenth from F# on the highest string down to the D in the middle of the instrument's range without any successive plucking of any one string, creating an overlapping, ringing sound somewhat like that of a handheld ('Celtic', in particular) harp. The 'trick', termed Campanella fingering (for its bell-like effect) is made very much more convenient by the tuning, which is bound

Ex.1.2 - descending 'Campanella-fingering' D major scale in DADGAD tuning



to the style. It is not impossible in standard, but it is arguably less integral, less characteristic, and less effective. It is also much less commonly employed.

The second emergent consideration is that there are some inconsistencies in all of this historical logic. If scordatura is a 'trick' then why is it the preserve of virtuosi? Is it not the point of a 'virtuoso' to have no need of 'tricks'? Of course, several common angles play into this phenomenon, principally Othering, perceived 'deviant' praxis, simple lack of understanding. It is a story too-often told that Paganini is said to have made a Faustian pact, but it is telling that some sort of explanation by means of the *super*-natural, the *dis*-embodied and the *im*-material has been required for such virtuosities derived by non-standard methods. There is even a composition of Tartini which is known as the 'Devil's Trill'. Of course, Biber, by virtue of being a Jesuit seems unlikely to be accused of Satanic malfeasances, but his scordatura are frequently viewed, even by Edgar (2008) in terms of religious symbolism: the crossed-over tunings, the rosary engravings, all this leaves the Mystery Sonatas unambiguously in the sacred-programmatic-devotional camp. These most fundamental of alterations to the physical process of playing the instrument are tied to abstracted elements, be they symbolic, schematic, or linked to any other kind of premeditated design. This link is telling. Scordatura either needs a 'reason' (Biber) or to be designed for some 'purpose', usually practical in nature, giving sound to something conceived of within the confines of a human mind. Neither of these approaches have much to do with scordatura as a practice or process independent of *ends*. It is always a mediator according to this logic, whether that is of 'meaning' or between an 'abstract' musical idea and its sonic realisation.

In the second kind of scordatura justification, I would posit in fact that there is an inherent presumption of an abstracted and immaterial musical realm with which the player interacts only as a mediator themselves. I suggest this for the following reason. Brushing scordatura aside can be read in two ways. Firstly, a presumption that some aspects of how some music is played are more important than others, more relevant to its purely musical content. Secondly, that no such aspects are relevant to the purely musical content of 'a piece'. The former is, in my view, careless for the cultural and practical reasons I have laid out previously, such as the signifying values of the instrument and individual ways of playing the instrument, the conditioning characteristics of scordatura which alter the relations of humans and instruments. The assumption in the second reading implies the existence of the aforementioned abstract realm of 'pure music'. To be clear, I do not deny the potential of scordatura to possess localised and coded meaning-content, or indeed its capacity to enable tricky passages which would otherwise sound strained and choked or even not at all. Yet that cannot be *all that it is*. It seems far too common in Baroque violin playing to be the result of Satanism, so it is probably something a little more grounded. Indeed I would argue that that is the fundamental tenet of scordatura. It is a practice whose very purpose is to alter the acoustic and practical properties of the instrument which in turn informs what is played or written. The practice of scordatura, then, creates a feedback loop between instrument and player. Much insight into this point is gained by Bates' pithy claim, made with regard to literary guitars becoming characters in novels themselves, that guitars 'teach their owners how to play them' (Bates 2012, p. 364). I use this somewhat out of its original context because I believe it to be, in a sense, literally true. I therefore use the phrase as a touchstone to stress the conditioning and suggestive role of the instrument in the making of music. The practice of scordatura is a particularly useful context in which to examine this, because it fundamentally and irrevocably

alters the relations between human and instrument. It does this because it *changes how the instrument works.* In any relationship, altering one party substantially changes how the relationship itself works. The same is true here. This point will be fundamental to my analyses because it is a way of illustrating the reciprocity of human-instrument relations.

(6) SCORDATURA: CURRENT AFFAIRS

There are several recent theses on the subject of scordatura, including that of Daniel Edgar, which has been covered extensively in the previous section, Nathan Cook's thesis on 20th-century violoncello scordatura (Cook 2005), and I-Chun Chiang's thesis on K.364 and the transposing viola (Chiang 2010). The latter is principally concerned with illustrating the performance history of Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante, K.364 and comes, where its content is relevant, to much the same conclusions as to the purpose of the scordatura and its value in this case. Cook's work offers some useful insight into ways that one might *categorise* scordaturas. He posits the following system:

> 'classification of the various rationales behind the use of *scordatura* techniques as 1) feasibility *scordaturas,* tunings that make the otherwise unplayable possible, 2) timbral *scordaturas,* tunings that affect a change in the colour of sound the instrument produces, and 3) special effects *scordaturas*, tunings that are used primarily for glissando or other special effects'
>
> (2005, pp. ii-iii)

There is much to be gained from this sort of thinking. Classification, taxonomy, labelling: these things provide us with excellent communicative and descriptive tools. And yet, Cook's phrasing is indicative of some presumptions which are at odds with the focus of this thesis. The phrase 'tunings that make the otherwise unplayable possible' is only separable from the second classification (timbre) where notes lower than the normal nadir of the instrument in question are concerned. 'The unplayable' is in all other cases theoretically possible, regardless of difficulty, unless one considers

timbre as fundamental to the characteristics of what is being played. This separation between 'notes' and 'sound' is a little off with regard to scordatura, and indicates that Cook partakes in object-as-mediator thought processes, implying a relation with the realm of pure music which takes precedence over those between performer and instrument, between performer and sound. There is perhaps more defence and justification for this in the area of score-based music than in that of the songwriter. The performer's relationship with their instrument in score-based music is (perhaps inevitably) far more proscribed than in the kind of feedback-loop writing praxis at play for the songwriter, or at the very least the purview of the instrument's influence and response is somewhat altered by the intervention of a score and the demarcated ideal of 'composition'.

As far as work on Joni Mitchell's guitar style is concerned, the relevant areas lie somewhere between the first and second of Cook's categories. The timbral kind, in particular, is likely of some relevance. These types of scordatura may fall into several categories, such as 'increased tension to brighten timbre as in 'soloist tunings' …', 'decreased tension to mellow the timbre', 'tunings that take advantage of sympathetic resonances', and 'tunings that allow for open string timbre on notes that normally would need to be stopped' (Cook 2005, p. 66). Despite these theoretical postulations there is little of any further applicability to Mitchell's guitar style in this thesis, as Cook largely discusses repertoire in two categories, first the type-3 scordatura piece, and second pieces where the bass string is detuned in order to create, for example in Sculthorpe's *Requiem for 'cello alone'* (1979), a funereal richness and depth of tone. Thus Cook is largely concerned with the glissando effect and that of the heavy, tolling bell. Where pieces containing more arcane scordatura come under discussion, the scordatura are of a dissonant species, as in Saariaho's *Spins and Spells* (1997) which is tuned to *Bb-G-c#-a*. Such an approach is not quite the same as that found in

Mitchell's music. I turn again, then, to Edgar, from whose thesis several kernels may be extracted. The first is this:

> it is the case that, in its normal state, tuned in fifths. the violin produces sympathetic resonance across its whole range and in many different keys. The effect of most scordaturas is actually to limit the resonance of the instrument usually to one key or tonal area. For example. in the second *Mystery Sonata* (the Visitation) the violin is tuned to *a e' a' e",* limiting the achievable sympathetic resonances to the sonata' s key of A major.
>
> (Edgar 2008, p.49)

As far as Biber is concerned, there may be an over-optimistic and somewhat anachronistic view of mid-Baroque violin tuning at play here, with regard, in particular, to temperament. It does appear to be the case that Edgar presumes some measure of equal temperament. In fact, I suspect Edgar's point is made the stronger by noting the potential for something closer to 'just' or mean-tone intonation in this tuning-pattern, especially without the encumbering pitch-constraints of frets. Even with frets, the tonal-confinement aspect of many scordatura (and essentially all scordatura on the guitar) is extremely significant, not only from the perspective of sympathetic resonance but also from that of the timbral qualities available for drones and pedals and the convenience of their production. Confining the acoustic properties of an instrument previously more 'versatile' in its tonal possibilities is of great relevance (perhaps even the crux) to Mitchell's guitar style, and I shall explore it in very fine detail later in this thesis.

Edgar also notes some instances in which Biber engineers brighter tone in the lower strings, permitting more complex passagework to ring clearly in the 'low register

of the violin' by means of 'the over-stringing effect of the scordatura'[17] (Edgar 2008, p. 50). He cites other examples where particular sections of the instrument's compass are made to be its dominant 'voice'. This approach to delineating between the strata of the instrument is also relevant to Mitchell's guitar style, as she, with the benefit of two further strings, expounds upon this kind of approach. At this point, however, the applicability of Edgar's work ceases, as there is little or nothing to suggest that the symbolic and religious content of the scordatura employed in the *Mystery Sonatas* have any meaningful analogue in *Song to a Seagull*.

The result of this is an awareness of the inextricability of Mitchell's actual guitar and her guitar style, as well as her cultural 'guitar', from 'her music'. This inextricability is such that it must be given analytical weight. Mitchell's style is material in the extreme just as it is highly idiosyncratic and the two are tied. Therefore, a focus on her guitar as central to her music is, in my view, critical when analysing *Song to a Seagull*. This moves the analyst into new terrain from many of the scholars I have referenced, as their concerns have been social, organological, cultural, and ultimately concerned with more widespread collections of *praxis* rather than the individual case. This is, of course, no indictment, merely an intention to take a different leaping-off point from the kernel that emerges from the work of Kevin Dawe and Eliot Bates, the kernel that there may be a 'value in what might be called 'thinking through instruments" (Bates 2012, p. 368). To analyse musical outpourings so highly embodied and so acutely personal as that of the singer-songwriter requires, then, an acknowledgement and thorough out-working of this realisation of the materiality and mutuality of the human relationship with instruments.

Having armed myself with this set of theoretical frameworks and ideas, in the following chapter I shall conduct a survey of extant literature on Joni Mitchell, in

[17] Over-stringing refers to the general increase in tension beyond the 'standard' level of string tension applied to a strung instrument, for example if I tuned all four strings on a violin or viola up a semitone.

particular on analyses, with a view to illustrating the extent to which these theoretical grounds may permit me to fill lacunae in the analytical literature. I shall focus, in particular, upon ways in which the centrality of scordatura in Mitchell's music slips to the edge of the analytical discussion.

CHAPTER 2 - INTERPENETRATING CATEGORIES IN 'I HAD A KING' AND 'MICHAEL FROM MOUNTAINS'

This chapter has three sections. The second and third of these discuss the interpenetration of different scordatura categories in 'I Had a King' (2) and 'Michael from Mountains' (3). The first of these sections, then, serves to establish these same categories, a crucial first step in discussing how they interpenetrate. This first section also draws out some attitudinal threads from some anecdotal and interview evidence (Marom and Mitchell, 2014, pp.75-6) with regard to Mitchell's thought-process and reasoning behind her whole-hearted embrace of this most analytically underserved of techniques. In part (2) the focus is placed upon the role of scordatura in the complex 17-bar structure of the main verse of 'I Had a King' and upon some preliminary scordatura-related 'habits' which will prove useful further on in the analysis. In part (3) the focus is the role of scordatura in enabling the moments of crucial contrast in 'Michael from Mountains' through its position as the nexus of timbre, harmony and texture. I also note some ways in which these timbre-forward formal devices might be analogised to formal features present in styles served by a more fleshed-out analytical tradition.

(1) RE-THINKING SCORDATURA CATEGORIES

This chapter analyses the first two songs from *Song to a Seagull: 'I Had a King*' and 'Michael from Mountains. These analyses enable us to draw out the interpenetration of categories that a serious focus on scordatura entails. Therefore, it is crucial to consider analytical categories for scordatura, as groundwork for the analytical discussion which follows. I will begin by considering the tripartite usage-based model of scordatura posited by Cook (2005).

> Classification of the various rationales behind the use of *scordatura* techniques as 1) feasibility *scordaturas,* tunings that make the otherwise unplayable possible, 2) timbral *scordaturas,* tunings that affect a change in the colour of sound the instrument produces, and 3) special effects *scordaturas*, tunings that are used primarily for glissando or other special effects
>
> (2005: ii-iii)

According to this model there are three forms of rationale behind the use of *scordatura*. All three require some modification. Firstly, 'feasibility' is too strong a word to use without qualifiication. Scordatura are better understood as making a set of chord shapes, picking patterns, and their ensuing pitch-class outcomes more *likely* rather than making previously 'impossible' pitch-class outcomes *possible*. It is a more gentle function which the tuning exerts, because it is concerned with likelihoods, exerting a softly suggestive governance over the sphere of what-might-be-expressed. In short, if what one 'thinks' through an instrument in 'composition' is influenced by the instrument, then the instrument may be said to have in part a function of governance

and constraint, and in part a function of encouragement and convenience: some things 'work' better than others.

Cook's third category (Ibid.) seems easily absorbed into the second. The term 'special effects' in this instance covers glissandi, sudden re-tunings, deliberately loose and 'flappy' strings, among other things. These are all elements whose pitch content is, in an important respect, incidental to their character and value, to those qualities, that is, which function as their defining characteristics. For example, I would incline towards describing a glissando (on most any instrument) as a glissando first, and its inciting and terminating pitch second, because of this high degree of timbral distinction. Thus, I would describe them as timbrally-defined sounds. For this reason they may be subsumed by the broader 'timbral' category. However, it is usually telling when category-decisions have been made. In this case it may indeed remain useful to preserve the possibility of further division, although not in the same terms.

This category-combination is furthermore supported by the outworkings of this question: where and how is a delineation between generically timbral content and 'special-effect' content to be accomplished? Is an extravagant form of articulation a special effect? Take flutter-tonguing as an example. At least part of the noteworthiness of that sound in early twentieth-century music appears largely to derive from its rareness. This would in general hold for most extended technique writing in twentieth-century music. Distinct as they are in practice, there is little to separate the use of a different form of tongue-articulation in woodwind playing, be it flutter-tonguing or a bass clarinettist's slap-tongue, and deciding to tune one's guitar to a particular distinctive sound, because they both follow a clear pattern: altered means of production, followed by altered sound produced. Of course, they are rather different in terms of *how* these means are altered, but scordatura is ultimately a rather radical form of extended technique. These extended techniques do, however, often entail highly

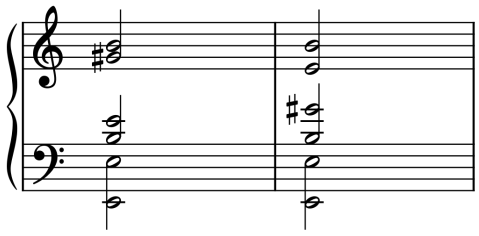
distinctive timbral content which cannot avoid the label of 'special effect'. It is also unproductive to consider these timbral details 'emergent' in the sense of 'accident' or 'by-product', yet they are perhaps 'emergent' in the sense of their being in a way experimental. One cannot always know for sure what the altered means of production will actually *produce,* even if one has tried an alternate tuning countless times before.

What benefit one would gain from achieving a clear delineation between the generically timbral and the 'special-effect' or the 'novelty' is unclear. The history of the analytical discussion (and lack thereof) of scordatura demonstrates some of the fallibilities of drawing such a line, namely that the use of scordatura is considered in some way cheap, other, illegitimate. It is also a line which cannot hope to be drawn smoothly.

The clarification and stratification above leaves two high-level categories of scordatura usage, feasibility and timbral. These categories are fairly stable entities upon which to conduct initial observations, but their interpenetrations are the ultimate subject of this analysis. The extent of this inextricability is profound. A timbral instance of scordatura is essentially *permitted* by the scordatura used: the things that feasibility scordaturas make feasible are timbrally signficant and distinct at minimum and quite often occupy, as does almost all of Joni Mitchell's debut album, a harmonic-timbral intersection in which voicing and pitch content are highly interdependent.

Voicing, in truth, is a crucial word through which to illustrate this harmonic-timbral complex. Consider Ex.2.1. Six singers sing an E major chord, with basses taking the second 'voice' in the bass clef, tenors taking the first, and altos the notes in the treble clef. In the first printed spacing there is, assuming a genuine bass, a reasonably even distribution of volume between the individual singers. The chord will sound, to use a favourite term of choral directors the world over, 'balanced'. If one were to swap the upper tenor and the lower alto and make no immediate request for

Ex.2.1 - two spacings of an E major chord for a choir



adjustments, this balance would be considerably altered. From the perspective of the aesthetic goals of 'good' choral part-writing, it would be reasonable to say it was heavily compromised. To return to this ideal of balance, the logical first step is to ask the upper tenor to 'sound like an alto'. This usually entails slightly sub-par falsetto singing by the tenor, but it serves to illustrate yet again the correlation of timbre and pitch, here in an explicitly harmonic context. The tenor needs to 'sound like an alto' because a tenor singing a high G# is singing at the top of their range. This has both timbral and dynamic implications (tenors singing high G# tend to do so very loudly, for both cultural and acoustic reasons) which are deeply integrated not only into 'good' choral direction but also 'good' choral *composition*. There are very different timbral parameters at play among six voices from those relevant to the six strings of a guitar, but their outworking is similar. In brief: change which voice/string sounds which pitch and the timbre of the chord changes too. This is, to reiterate, pertinent to the interplay of the feasible and the sonic in scordatura usage because the scordatura enables and permits the sounds produced. There are both possibility and plausibility conditions at play, which influence the sounds produced through alterations to the tuning of the instrument. The more general and most important point here is that the musical phenomenon of scordatura-centricity must be considered in light of the interrelation of physical and sonic systems, the former being productive processes, the latter outcomes and 'results'.

There are two risks inherent in reading scordatura as above. Firstly, that one might start to ignore the human in this system, leaving 'the tuning' and 'its music'. There are several reasons why this view should be avoided. Firstly, as I have already highlighted, re-tuning considerations on timbral and convenience grounds are far from unique to the guitar, being found in a variety of situations even in the Western Classical Tradition. One might even go so far as to suggest that the vertically-oriented structure of the study of orchestration is testament to the import of the pitch-register-timbre relationship, in much the same way as emerges from the choral music example. Placing the right amount of weight on the right notes in the chord, not making the lower register 'muddy', correctly widened spacing, not having melodic lines played in 'weak' instrumental registers, all of these are considerations about the intersection of the individual pitch-register-timbre (and emergent perceived volume) characteristics of the instruments. Despite these ostensibly rigorous optimisation-parameters, the variety of music written for instruments with matched timbral-pitch parameters is so wide that it would be spurious to claim that an instrument's state of tuning *causes* (in a linear, one-to-one sense) what is written for it. It is not a question of causality, but rather one of what might be loosely termed 'permission'. Of course, what 'works' in a particular instrumental configuration becomes customary. These customs and sets of practices govern many different sets of parameters depending on instrument and cultural context. Furthermore, scordatura is only scordatura because of a 'standard' - in this sense it is easy to imagine DADGAD, for example, having become the universal 'standard' tuning. DADGAD, a tuning 'invented' by British folk guitarist Davey Graham is indeed heavily associated with particular styles, in which it even approaches

'standard' status.[18] [19] It is therefore still more necessary to think of the effects of scordatura in terms of altering the soft-governance function of instrumental optimisation: changing the tuning changes what is easy and what will tend to be considered attractive or 'good' (and indeed what sounds easy). The harmonies which will ring in interesting fashions, the patterns which will allow those harmonies to 'speak', the brisk slides between chords of the same shape, which make the 'parallelistic' writing Mitchell is so known for so distinctive, all of these are conditioned by the gentle constraints of the tuning. Returning to the choral analogy briefly, it is far better to write an alto part for altos than to ask tenors to impersonate an alto, acoustically and with regard to allowing those who would conduct the music to manage their singers effectively.[20] The other sense in which the direct causal view of tuning and ensuing music can be avoided is associated with this. It is one of the guitar's principal characteristics that it is extremely easy to re-tune. The range of pitches to which the individual strings may be tuned is also very wide. One could view the individual possible tunings of the guitar as in a sense vocabularies, of which there are very many. There are convenient sets of things that work well in each, sounds easily expressed, sounds *likely* to be expressed. Moreover, these changes of tuning are by definition *elective* by human hand: a guitar does not, and cannot, tune itself.

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[18] I place 'invented' in inverted commas simply because, despite no previous records of the tuning existing, it seems quite unlikely that it was not employed in some way previously.

[19] Noteworthy users of the tuning include Mícheál Ó Domhnaill (Skara Bræ), John Martyn, Tony McManus, Bert Jansch and Pierre Bensusan. It is particularly common in solo guitar situations, although it may be most famously employed in the thunderous opening riff of Led Zeppelin's 'Kashmir'.

[20] From my reasonably extensive experience as a choral tenor, it is quite common to be asked to sound 'more alto-ish' for brief moments, which is usually not too irritating. However, over extended passages, or in the case of modern-edition Palestrina, it becomes extremely tiresome. This is, unlike many choral-singing peeves, acoustically well-founded. Extended lines sitting in the range between middle C and F above middle C sit in the *passaggio* between 'head' and 'chest' voice, an intermediary portion of the voice where many technical issues often arise and even without these issues significant tiredness can ensue, especially when singing quietly, which is what is frequently meant by 'more alto-ish'. These issues were not unknown to Palestrina. In fact, most of these high tenor parts arise from modern transposed editions, which are often raised by a minor third to *raise* the original alto parts into a more comfortable tessitura.

Mitchell has furthermore provided the analyst with something of a green light with regard to foregrounding the elective nature and supreme importance of scordatura.

> Well, I only wrote two songs in standard tuning. "Urge for Going," which was one of the very first ones, if not the first one I wrote — the first one that I considered successful anyway. I never wrote and played in standard tuning again, because everything sounded like it was mined out. No matter how well you played in it, it just seemed like a tired and worn-out road. Everything sounded derivative. I was trying to get at something that would excite me, a fresher thing. Before I began my own tunings, which a lot of them are tuned to sus chords . . .
>
> …not knowing what a sus chord was myself, I called them chords of inquiry. They have a question mark in them.
>
> (Marom and Mitchell, 2014, pp.75-6)

Tunings, then, are paramount to Mitchell, both as something of a declaration of independence and as a search for musical and sonorous novelty.[21] Moreover, she highlights the very inquisitive qualities of her 'chords of inquiry' which I have already discussed at length with regard to 'Sisotowbell Lane'. The same text provides a few further insights into some of the 'compositional' attitudes Mitchell employs in conjunction with her open tunings.

> Wayne Shorter said to me, "What are these chords? These are not guitar chords and these are not piano chords. What are these chords?" And then he said, "You

[21] Also paramount to Mitchell is that '[they're] sustained. Men don't like them because they like resolution, just like they do in life.' (Marom and Mitchell, 2014, pp.75-6) I note this here as it is a crucial aspect of Mitchell's general attitude of independence, be that from standard tuning or, as we might observe from both this interview and some of her lyrics, romantic partners. It is, however, not the goal of this thesis to discuss Mitchell's work from a feminist angle, for two reasons, the first of which is that Anne Karppinen (2016) has already done it admirably. Secondly, this thesis has a singular focus on a particular technical aspect, for the purposes of enriching music analysis. To introduce another angle which, if treated properly, is itself rich enough to fill a book, would be a disservice to both.

> realise some of them are sus chords." And he went, "They create suspense. They're suspensions. They're unresolved, like a major is a positive statement. A minor is a tragic chord, right? The seventh is a kind of a bluesy chord. But a sus chord has a question mark in it. It lacks resolution." So the law, according to Wayne Shorter, who studied music and had a degree from Berklee College of Music, he said, "We were taught to never stay on a sus chord too long. Never ever go from a sus chord to a sus chord." I stay on sus chords a long time and go from sus chord to sus chord, and then by building that, because it builds tension, when you drop into a major chord, it's like the major chord was never more major. It's like a complementary colour — the sky just opens up. I don't really know the neck comprehensively, but as far as composing and finding unusual chordal colours and combinations, my system works for me very well. Except that when it comes to sitting down and playing with someone else and following their music, I'm handicapped in communicating with other musicians. I have to just play it, and they'll say, "Oh yeah, now she's going to a C. Here's she's going to a such and such."
>
> (Marom and Mitchell, 2014, pp.75-6)

In particular, Mitchell's declaration that she tends to 'stay on sus chords a long time and go from sus chord' for the purpose of making a major chord 'never more major' (Ibid.) is indicative of some traits and even large-scale structural devices which I will examine in the foregoing. She highlights in these statements the connection between her movement away from standard tuning and her use of sus chords, by tuning the instrument to those very harmonies.

In this section I have put forward a very general theoretical approach to scordatura-centric analysis, which may be summarised thus: every note has two kinds

of parameter, the first being pitch, and the second being timbre. Since scordatura's profoundest effects are upon what notes are easily or readily sounded in what manner (timbre), keeping this bifocal lens trained on Mitchell's music should allow for an analysis which keeps scordatura to the fore.

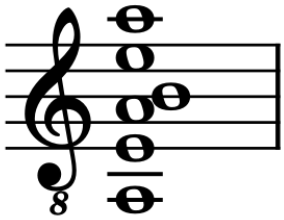
(2) 'I HAD A KING'

The first song of Joni Mitchell's studio recording career is, as Karppinen puts it, 'a leave-taking' (2016, p 51). This refers principally to the text, dealing (allegorically) with 'her divorce' and her 'move from Canada to the United States' (Ibid). And yet, 'I Had a King' is, when read, curiously staid, at least in light of the novelty of its individuality in the context of a 'late sixties when popular music still tended to concern itself with universal topics, and solitary girls (and boys) with guitars were associated with anti-war songs' (Ibid). It is unfussily strophic. It is steeped in historical and fantastical allusion, to the point that Mitchell even refers to her ex-husband as her king.[22] Each strophe discusses a different sphere in which the melancholic effects of 'leave-taking' are felt, a different facet of life in which the parties are irreconcilable, first the house, then socially, then allegorically in a failing fantastical realm of a 'salt-rusted carriage'. There is a significant use, then, of deliberately antiquated imagery, which perhaps furthers the effect of the distance between the singer and her former 'king'.

The first analytical problem to solve here is how to communicate tunings to a readership with no guaranteed experience of playing guitars in scordatura. The tuning in which 'I Had a King' is played is a good example of some of the difficulties that may arise. The song is played with a capo at the seventh fret such that the effective open strings are tuned to the collection of pitches shown in Ex.2.2. One approach might be to describe it as Open D Sus2 capo 7, and indeed this is probably the most common way to describe guitar tunings in general. However, 'Open D Sus2 capo 7' is quite an

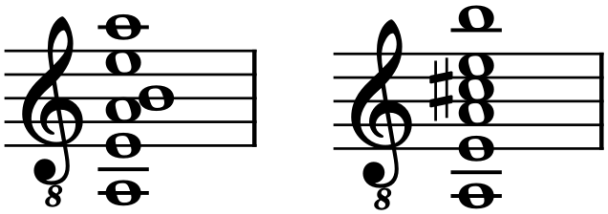
[22] These allusions, largely in the third stanza, range from 'the power of moons' to being 'carried… off to his country for marriage' in a 'salt-rusted carriage', and are far from the most clear-cut fantastical or mystical allusions of the song. This is not a phenomenon at all unique to Mitchell. Explicit reference to the work of J.R.R. Tolkien in particular was not uncommon in the late 1960s, the most famous example being the lyric: 'in the darkest depths of Mordor - I found a girl so fair - but Gollum, the evil one' etc… from the Led Zeppelin song 'Ramble On' (Led Zeppelin, 1969: 7).

Ex.2.2 - 'I Had a King' tuning



unwieldy nomenclature because it does not actually tell one *exactly* how to tune the instrument, in addition to being somewhat wordy. This issue is particularly problematic in communicating with a non-guitarist readership, because there are several 'possible' tunings that Open D Sus2 capo7 could refer to. Consider the idea of Open A Sus2, the result of the capo 7 being the transposition of a fifth.[23] This could mean several different things, especially given the relative instability of the distinction in common use between 'Sus' and 'Add' chords. Ex.2.3 shows two possible interpretations of the tuning description Open A Sus2, including the one actually used. Option B may seem a little strange, but it is not totally inconceivable within the bounds of Mitchell's guitar style, a style which includes the double-suspension *with the third* in the tuning and final chord of 'Sisotowbell Lane'. This lack of clarity will not stand in an analytical context.

Ex.2.3 - possible "I Had a King tunings



[23] Here I break my own chord-description rules with regard to the addition of fourths and seconds in this singular case for the purposes of illustrating the very lack of clarity those rules circumvent.

Another option would be to use the taxonomic tuning-index system employed on the website *jonimitchell.com*. This fan forum indexes its user-submitted unofficial transcriptions of Mitchell's songs by means of a slightly better means of identifying tunings termed the 'Joni Tuning' system. The tuning used for 'I Had a King' would be described as x75255. This indicates the intervals between strings, described by number of semitones, the x being a placeholder for the bass string. It is certainly both more specific in terms of voicing and clearer than a 'harmonic' tuning description, which permits, as Ex.2.3 shows, a good deal of uncertainty in this most crucial of parameters. It also permits a good deal of cross-referencing. I prefer, however, simply to display the tuning as a chord, as in Ex.2.2 because the space is afforded by this analysis and because it allows the *exact* harmonic content of the tuning to be represented immediately. It also permits the inference of certain playing characteristics, certain likely points of stopped-open seminal dissonance, and other characteristics of Mitchell's general style of guitar playing.

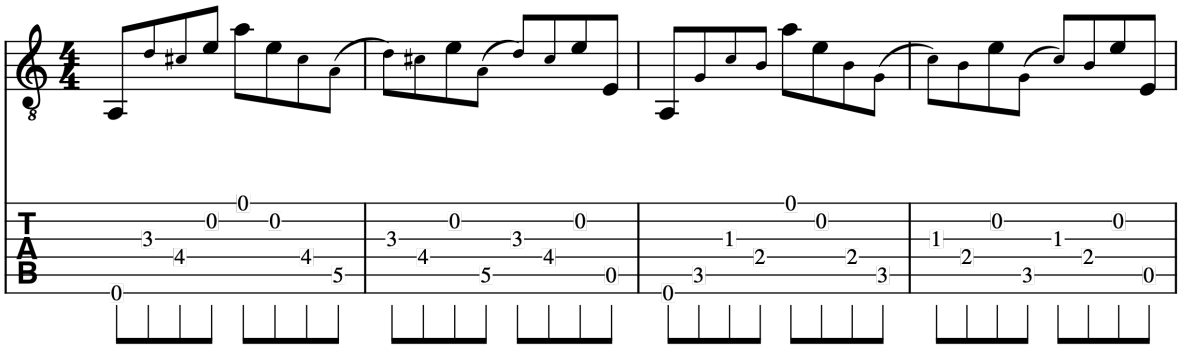
Having settled on staff notation of the chord produced by the open strings as the most convenient method for displaying and describing tunings, some things can be noted about the tuning of 'I Had a King'. What is most significant and immediately apparent about the tuning of 'I Had a King' is that it is an open tuning, emphasising some sort of A tonality, without a third, much like DADGAD. This sort of tuning does not commit the user to either major or minor sonorities, and thus is extremely well suited to the cultivation of modal ambiguity while still retaining the sonic 'open' quality of an open tuning. How precisely to define this 'open' characteristic is a problem worth addressing at this juncture. Essentially, the open string has a distinctive sustaining property, very much longer than a stopped string, though often fairly quiet. The high density of open strings thus has a very characteristic sound, especially when played reasonably gently with fingers and a very minimal amount of muting, as

Mitchell does. I might describe it as slightly 'blurry' or 'washy' when quiet, 'rich' and even perhaps 'tolling' or 'booming' when louder.

Returning to the modal ambiguities possible in such a tuning as this, 'I Had a King' contains a great deal of oscillation between C# and C in the inner strings, beginning with the very first change of chord. The tuning is inextricably tied to each of the three significant facets of what is played here, in the introductory 4 bars of the song.

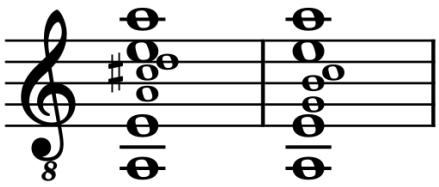
The first facet of these four bars that is facilitated by the tuning is the use of pedals and parallelisms in conjunction with one another: the first, second and sixth strings remain open throughout the section and provide a filled AEA pedal against which the three-finger fretted element is sounded. This kind of combination of pedals (usually on open strings in the bass and treble) with fretted cells (usually in the middle strings and moved around in parallel), as much of the foregoing analysis will show, is extremely prevalent in Mitchell's music. This particular interior unit is characterised by the semitone units (D-C#, C-B) played on the third and fourth strings, a dissonance which is extremely common in Mitchell's guitar work, although somewhat distinctively this seminal dissonance is *part of* the element rather than arising from the movement of element against pedal(s). It is tempting when looking at the staff-notated version of the opening of this song (Ex.2.4) to parenthesise the D in the first two bars and the C in

Ex.2.4 - 'I Had a King' bb.1-4 - stopped notes in small noteheads



bb.3-4. This is impossible to justify when listening to the song though, given that Mitchell lets all of the strings ring for their natural duration. Given that these notes are close to the *de facto* nut the Capo produces, they possess reasonable amounts of sustain, and are heard to ring out until the chord changes. Thus, the first 'chord' contains both major third and fourth, the second both minor third and major second. I show these harmonies in reduced form with open strings in large noteheads and stopped notes in small ones in Ex.2.5.

Ex.2.5 - 'I Had a King' first two chords



Here a nuance of Mitchell's playing may convey direct harmonic information and assist with the categorisation of these sounds. The emphasis on the D and C such that they are very much louder and more pronounced than what might in a more surface-level reading appear to be their resolutions creates a curious hierarchy of pitches within these sonorities wherein the C# and B are to some degree the 'colour' notes.[24] Thus the progression sounds as a decorated move from an Asus or quartal A to an A minor 9th, which makes rather more 'sense' as a description of this underlying opening progression than simply I-i, due to the strong parallel 4th movement. This progression, then, is in an important sense fundamentally *quartal*.

The overlapping and sustaining characteristic which plays into this harmonic reading is abetted on the studio recording because the part is double-tracked in such a

[24] The readiest objection to this reading would be to view the D and C as appoggiaturas, especially given the prevalence of 'phrasing-away'. I do not consider them to be appoggiaturas though, because Mitchell does not mute the strings, leaving them to ring on against what one might immediately leap to calling their 'resolutions'. Furthermore, if they are deemed to have at the very least equal significance, some interesting structural properties become clearer.

manner as to create a shimmering chorus-like effect.[25] The second facet which the tuning facilitates is the modal ambiguity. The C-natural and C# alternation pervades the song and is well-established in this opening passage. The third facet which the tuning facilitates is the combination of complex upper-structure harmonies with simple V-I root motion over the barline. This is not at all unplayable in other tunings, but it is very convenient indeed in this one. The upper structures are allowed to ring out because they are played on largely open strings, with their significant sustaining properties. Such conveniences as are present in this introductory 4-bar unit abound in the guitar part of this song.[26] This stratified nature also plays into the intersection point of 'composition' and 'performance'. The manner in which Mitchell plays the individual notes is highly significant in how they are perceived hierarchically and gesturally and this impinges upon how they are understood harmonically and melodically. This would in some situations lead to questions of how integral the particular performance practices in the song are to its 'whole'. Given my focus on physical process it seems unproductive to stray into the ontological side of such questions. It is rather more productive to note the ways in which the scordatura has informed what is played and how it is played. It is easy, and more *likely*, to emphasise parts of a texture which are already likely to be timbrally distinct from other elements. This is very prevalent in Mitchell's guitar style.

An example is to be found in the introduction to the song (Ex.2.4). The slurs denote moments of significant performance emphasis, which as can be clearly seen imply and enforce the parallel-quartal harmonic logic of the introductory section through the gestural forwardness of this melodic fourth. The selfsame gesture is

[25] 'Chorus' as used here refers to a form of electric guitar signal processing, by which the raw signal is split in two or duplicated, and the second instance is delayed by a very short margin and also modulated. This was initially a means of making the guitar signal seem as though there were multiple instruments playing, but quickly became a characteristic effect in its own right.

[26] Convenience is not in my usage meant derogatorily but rather to imply a beneficial concordance of 'musical idea' and instrumental parameter.

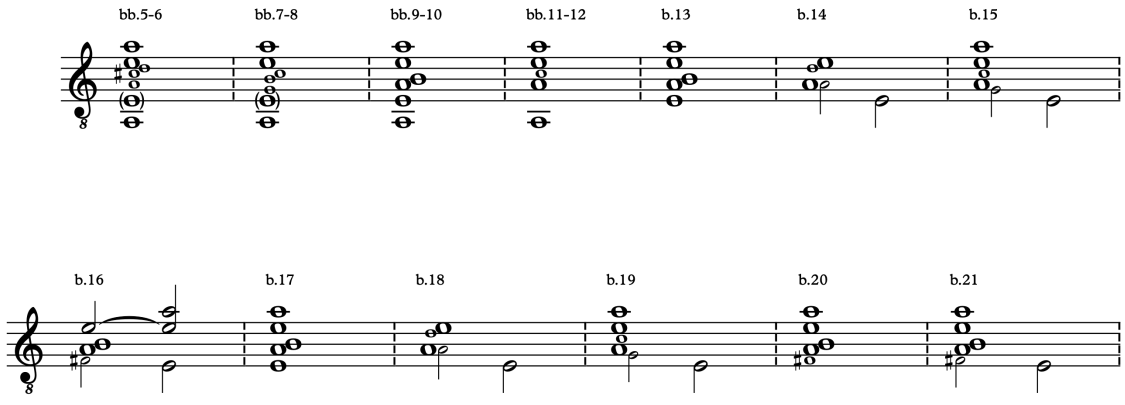
Ex.2.6 - 'I Had a King' introduction and verse transcription bb.1-21



abetted, though, by the scordatura and the chord-shape in which the fourth resides: the difference and distinction in timbre and the harmonic logic coalesce with remarkable effectiveness. This particular gesture is later reinforced by the vocal line, which is partly doubled by these same fourths and the semitones which follow them on 'a tenement castle' and 'to painting the pastel'. These subtle concordances between the harmony, the playing, and even the voice are closely tied to Mitchell's treatment of the scordatura.

Significant elements of the guitar part being well-established, it is appropriate to expand the lens somewhat to look at the significance of scordatura in an entire verse of the song. Conveniently enough in the case of the strophic 'I Had a King' this can account for the entire song. There are however lyrical delineations within the strophe, mirrored in the music to some extent, which generate a refrain ('I can't go back there anymore'). This provides a convenient point of delineation within the otherwise rather complex strophe. The 'verse' section of the strophe (including the 4-bar introduction) is printed as Ex.2.6, both with tablature (in the tuning printed in Ex.2.2) and with staff notation.

Ex.2.7 - 'I Had a King' reduction bb.5-21



All stopped notes are printed with small noteheads in this example, from which the prevalence of open strings is quite visible. The first, fifth and sixth strings are in fact *never stopped* throughout the verse section of the strophe (up to the end of b.21). Exactly how to discuss the effect of this is more of a puzzle. The problem is that most of this strophe can be made to fit a kind of 'decorated A minor' model, but if one does so, one is left with a rather bland reading. The solution to this is provided by consideration of the various textural layers which are inextricably bound to the scordatura employed in this song.

Ex.2.7 shows a harmonic reduction from b.5 to b.21. Small noteheads again indicate stopped notes, while large noteheads indicate open notes. Considering the inner voices of the texture, the preponderance of seconds is immediately noteworthy. So too is the avoidance of the major third. C# is not sounded in the verse after the first two bars of the strophe. The move away from the slightly destabilised (by virtue of the adjacent fourth) A major sonority to the 'actual' tonality of the verse, an A Dorian, functions in large part by virtue of the parallelistic sliding of the chord shape on the 2nd, 3rd and 4th strings, a tonality darkened significantly at one point by the F natural in the voice at the end of the phrase 'he's taken the curtains down'. The A minor ninth

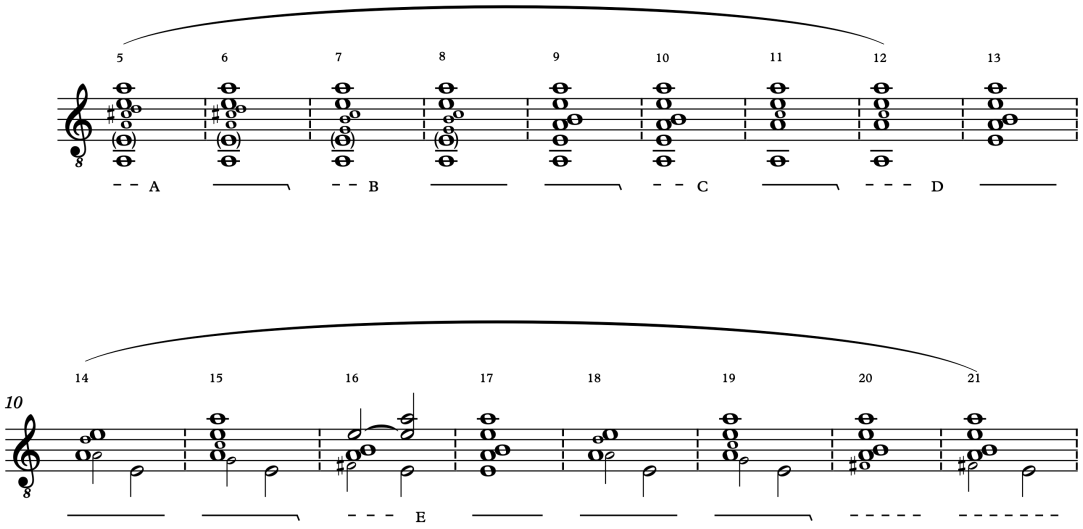
Ex.2.8 - 'Blackbird' bb.1-7 transcription



bb.7-8 is arguably somehow re-tonicised, a noteworthy example of the harmonic valence of scordatura. Looking more broadly through this harmonic overview, one finds that bb.14-21 consist of two (varied) instances of a descending minor tetrachord (A-G-F#-E) over an E pedal, with upper harmonies containing many fourths and seconds. The influence of the scordatura here is essentially to generate the most likely kind of moving stopped-stratum, which is most easily described in fact as a *chord shape*. Standard tuning implies a different sort of moving stratum, unsurprisingly a tertiary one. The ninth between the A and B strings makes playing moving lines in minor and major tenths very straightforward in standard, allowing for a functional-harmonic, or at the very least tertiary, approach to the stratum-pedal guitar style. There are few more famous examples of this than the Beatles' 'Blackbird' (1968), the opening few bars of which are printed as Ex.2.8. This is as tertiary and functional as a popular song is likely to get. It even has a linear chromatic ascent from 4 to 6 in the bass and the associated (implicit) diminished seventh harmony. Yet there are certain parallels in style with Mitchell. Playing the open pedal string off the beat is fairly typical of her guitar style for example. It might even be claimed that the plausibility of combining quite conventional, *functional* tonal logic with the significant sonic possibilities of the guitar in the form of the distinction between open and stopped notes is a significant benefit of 'standard' guitar tuning, even perhaps a reason for its very status as 'standard'.

Returning to 'I Had a King', it is fortunate to find that the first element of the structural crux of this section may be divined by as simple a device as counting bar numbers and lines of lyrics. When delineation is done purely harmonically, there is a clear 8-bar section, another bar, and another clear 8-bar section. The lyrics have seven (or five, and the distinction is unimportant) lines, and there is a subtle offsetting of harmonic and textual/semantic rhythm. This offsetting is, although subtle, quite profound in its structural impact upon the song. Ex.2.9 shows a full harmonic

Ex.2.9 - 'I Had a King' reduction bb.5-21 with harmonic and vocal phrase markings



reduction of the verse with several additions from Ex.2.7. The two long slurs indicate the two 8-bar harmonic sections, and the odd-bar-out in between them. Why this bar is left alone will be explained in the foregoing. Below the stave, the letters A-E indicate the vocal phrases, with the full lines marking their rough continuations, and the dotted lines marking periods of vocal inactivity. The lyrics in this section are below, with parentheses indicating that the words within are sung to anacruses, and hyphens indicating barlines:

A (b.5-6) -	I had a king in a | tenement castle
B (b.7-9.1) -	Lately he's taken to | painting the pastel walls | brown
C (b.10.3-12) -	(He's) taken the | curtains down
D (b.13-16) -	(He's) | swept with the broom of con | tempt and the rooms have an | empty ring
E (b.17-21) -	(He's) | cleaned with the tears of an | actor who fears for the |laughter's sting

The phrase in bb.5-9 is relatively straightforward. Phrase A occupies two bars, while phrase B is a variation on A with an extra syllable, emphasised, occupying an extra bar. This accounts for the first five bars. Phrase C enters slightly later in the bar than do phrases A and B, but its main weight lands on b.11, or the 7th bar of the section. So, there is a phrase structure that might be described as 2 + 3 + 1 + 2 occupying the first 8-bar harmonic unit. While not the most orthodox of phrase structures, the melody does also conform in terms of gesture with the 4 groups of 2. Phrases A and B enter in the 1st and 3rd bars on the same syncopation, and the 5th and 7th bars both have textual and melodic weight placed on them with the words 'brown' and 'curtains', the former through the vocal delivery and the note being the tonic, and the latter because the E Mitchell sings is the highest vocal note thus far in the song.

The phrase in bb.13-21 is more complex. In brief, two systems of four-bar phrased units are set up, offset from one another by a bar. These systems, one textual and one harmonic, are quite clearly demarcated, running in the textual case bb.13-16, 17-20, and in the harmonic one bb.14-17, 18-21. This asynchronous relation possesses significant structural effects, felt most notably in the holding of the final note of the verse melody, setting the word 'sting' in the first instance, over a bass suspension. This creates a kind of integrated pre-chorus moment of harmonic tension. Two questions, I would suggest, arise about this offsetting procedure. Firstly, why is this 'successful', rather than sounding like a macrocosmic version of Jay Foreman's offset-syllable performances of Beatles songs?[27] Secondly, what has it to do with scordatura? These are in my view the same question, because scordatura has a fundamental role in the establishment of both of these high-stability offset phrase groupings. This is achieved

[27] These performances, to be clear, are comedic in design, and feature regularly in Foreman's live shows, one example being available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Een_AKh7Nik

through several subtle means. In b.13, the bass A string is silenced, creating a strong I-V gesture in root motion. The upper A string also becomes more intermittent at this point. In creating these significant and sudden changes to the ambitus of the guitar part, the downbeat of b.13 functions as a sectional starting-point, yet further emphasised by the harmony being entirely open and omitting only the low A. This emphasis is in line with the (presumed, almost normative) text-centric phrase structuring which is presented at the surface of the song.

However, the descending minor tetrachord/pedal line begins in b.14, and is sounded as a compound-melodic bass *on one string*, which has obvious and significant phrasing significance, reinforcing the harmony-centric phrase structuring in its subcutaneous competition with the text-centric phrasing. Therefore, b.21, the 'extra' bar at the end, feels entirely necessary, and serves to create significant pre-refrain tension. Scordatura functions as a connective agent in other ways in this passage. For example, the shapes in bb.14-15 and bb.18-19 differ from the first four bars only in that the 3rd string is open rather than stopped, a subtle and likely audible variation. It is also because of the stratum-delineating slid-shape change enabled only by the song's peculiar scordatura that the move from Aadd4 to Amin9 (bb.6-7) is simultaneously so seamless and yet emphasised. The structural weight of this manoeuvre is profound. As noted previously, C# (or in other words the Mixolydian) is steadfastly avoided for the rest of the verse. The modal shift to an A Dorian is thus significant and enabled largely by this sliding-against-pedals gesture which is so very characteristic of Mitchell's guitar style. This modal shift for the verse also prepares and emphasises the return of C# in the refrain.

There are in fact a number of elements which return or emerge anew in the refrain (Ex.2.10) of 'I Had a King'. Firstly, the low A string returns. Secondly, C# is sounded again, placing the refrain back in A Mixolydian. Thirdly, the upper A string is

Ex.2.10 - 'I Had a King' bb.22-31



for the first time stopped, functioning contra-melodically to the voice. Cumulatively, the effect of these shifts is quite marked. The additional fourth in range above and the additional fifth below produces a total registral expansion of a full ninth, leading to a significant shift in sonic palette. The melodic use of the high string contributes to this also, as it has a distinct character when stopped, and played with a shade of vibrato as here. One can also read the general sweeping gesture from the low A to the high D-C# gesture as an expansion of and variation upon the initial gesture of the song, by means largely of the registral transfer of the D-C# and its treatment as a melodic line (on one string) rather than as the gently dissonant harmonic feature of the verse. In sum, the

refrain contains the returns of numerous pre-sown seeds as well as a more expansive arrangement both timbrally, registrally, and in terms of the number of parts.

'I Had a King' demonstrates several tenets of Mitchell's style which will be useful starting-points going forward in this analysis. All of these tie clearly to scordatura in ways that have been demonstrated in this section. The first of these tenets is the use of inner-string 'cells' moving against outer string pedals, a device which embodies the intersection of 'harmony', gesture, and texture. The second is in a sense an outgrowth of this, namely the way in which Mitchell sublimates harmonies which, struck simultaneously, might be jarring, through arpeggiation, syncopation, and clearly demarcated bass movement. The third, though less common than the others, proceeds from the second, it being Mitchell's tendency to sublimate irregular section-lengths and competing harmonic and gestural processes through the same textural strategy. This is particularly noteworthy in 'Marcie'.

A fourth tenet is the use of modal ambiguity. This has been remarked upon before, both in this section and by other analysts, but bears further exploration. Indeed, 'polymodal' is one of five terms which Lloyd Whitesell (2008, p.119-125) uses to categorise the different sorts of harmonic organisation in Mitchell's entire recorded corpus. There is a curious variation in the interplay between scordatura and alternations of mode in the four songs from *Song to a Seagull* (Mitchell 1968) which Whitesell calls polymodal. These four songs are 'I Had a King', 'Nathan la Franeer', 'The Dawntreader', and 'Michael from Mountains'. 'The Dawntreader' is similar to 'I Had a King' with regard to this interplay, as the tuning lacks a third, and the alternations in mode are, as in 'I Had a King', between those with a major and minor third, in that case around the tonal centre of D. In 'Nathan la Franeer', in stark contrast, Mitchell generates some of the most arresting word-painting on the record through the juxtaposition of stopped B-flats and open B-naturals in the context of a

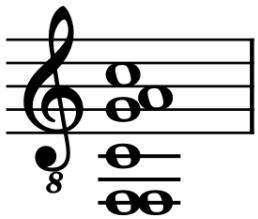
song in G, which I discuss in more detail in the section analysing the song fully. The interplay of scordatura and modal mixture in 'Michael from Mountains' will discussed in the following section.

(3) 'MICHAEL FROM MOUNTAINS'

In analysing 'Michael from Mountains' it is again useful to start with the tuning. The tuning in use in this song is still more idiosyncratic than that of 'I Had a King', and is shown in Ex.2.11. It has a few salient features that can be tied to major characteristics of the song immediately.

The most important of these salient features is that the low 'E' and 'A' strings are both tuned to an F. This is uncommon, even within Mitchell's extraordinarily wide palette of different tunings, and therefore worthy of some exploration. This simple facet of the tuning has several profound effects. One of these is that bass notes can be doubled at pitch on strings with distinct timbres.[28] The more significant effect of this, however, is that the string normally tuned to A is not tuned to A here, creating a power chord across the three lowest strings.[29] The ability to *avoid* a major third in the low registers of the instrument is even more of a factor in 'Michael from Mountains' than where the narrowest intervals immediately above the bass in the entire song, aside from unisons, are fifths, which can be seen in Ex.2.13. This set of 3 strings tuned to the root

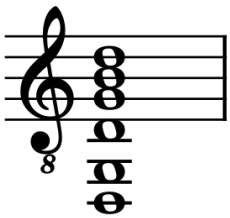
Ex.2.11 - 'Michael from Mountains' tuning



[28] The strings normally tuned to E and A are of markedly different thicknesses and masses, meaning that when one tunes the 'E' string *up* to an F and the 'A' string *down* to an F the strings, though sounding the same pitches at the same frets, produce markedly different sounds.

[29] 'Power chord' usually refers either to a bare fifth played on the lowest two strings of a guitar or a root-fifth-octave voicing across the three lowest strings. It is most commonly referred to thus with regard to rock and metal music. The phenomenon arose largely because, when played through highly distorted amplification as is common in those styles, a sound that is more defined and simultaneously less prone to feedback than a full major chord across the whole instrument can be achieved. This dissonance largely arises from the dissonance between the upper partials of the root, emphasised by the distortion, and the high major third. Removing this creates a much more aggressive and yet controllable sound which is highly conducive to more energetic styles.

Ex.2.12 - 'Marcie' and 'The Gallery' tuning



and fifth low in the register also abets the use of simple barre chords across the whole neck, as only two fingers are needed to barre a major chord.[30] Another upshot is that it becomes difficult to 'foul' a bass string when the two lowest strings are tuned to the same note. Indeed, Mitchell does not generally strike both unison bass strings concurrently, as far as I can tell from the studio recording. She appears to reserve these doubled soundings for moments of structural significance. 27 seconds into the track, as she sings 'there's oil in the puddles', for example, there may be a doubled attack. It would seem odd largely to ignore one of the strings of the guitar, yet this is not especially unique even within Mitchell's output. 'The Gallery' (Mitchell, 1969: 6), in the same open G tuning as 'Marcie' (Ex.2.12), does not feature a single attack on the low D string.[31] That aspect of the argument is still more profound here, as were one to leave the lowest string tuned to E in *this* tuning, the results of 'fouling' would be still more jarring. In sum, the doubled bass tuning in 'Michael from Mountains' provides at the very least several factors of convenience for playing the song. Furthermore, the harmonies in the bridge are tied entirely to the voicing the tuning produces, as well as to a highly unorthodox fashion of playing, which I will discuss in more detail.

In 'Michael from Mountains', Mitchell builds formal contrasts out of marked and synchronised shifts in timbre and harmony. These contrasts are found at both local

[30] The first finger as a barre across all six strings, with the second or third finger two frets higher on the G string.

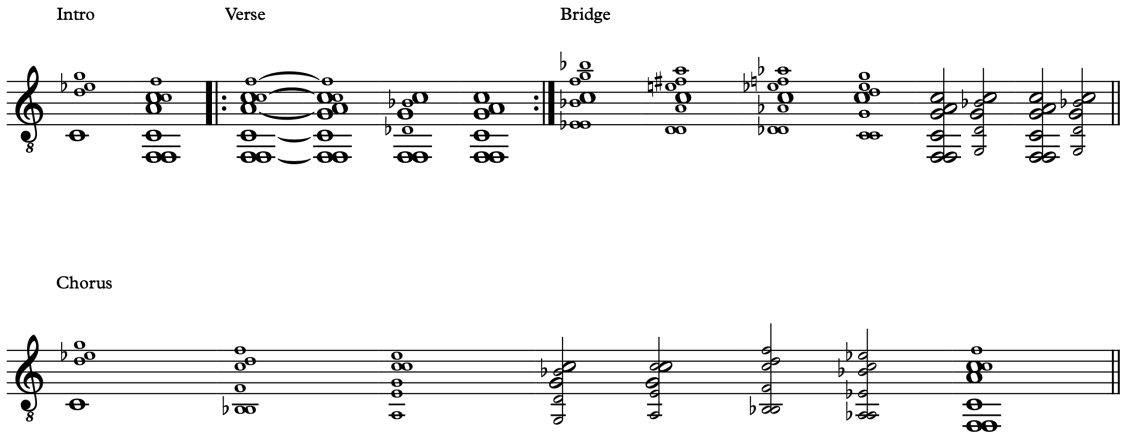
[31] Arguably there is no way of knowing if it is in fact tuned to a D. However, it would be odd to tune to Open G and leave an E that one might quite easily 'fluff' as the bass string. In other words, it is far more convenient to tune the bass string to a D.

and immediate levels and sectional ones. They even extend to the arrangement on the studio recording, where a second guitar provides a more complex texture in the bridge. These shifts are the principle agents in the form of the song.

Ex.2.13 shows a structural and harmonic outline.The introduction to 'Michael from Mountains' comprises a decorated v-I cadence in F. The main verse section consists of a tonic-dominant double-pedal with a I-iv alternation, with extensive decoration in the form of ninths and thirteenths. The bridge is built around a chromatically descending series of add9 chords with a C (V) pedal, moving from bVII to V. The chorus harmonies are predicated on bass motion with parallel fifths, making first a descent from V to II, followed by an ascent to IV and finally a bIII-I cadence. These harmonic languages do not have much in common when viewed purely in terms of notes. The key, as I have already posited, is timbre, and the synthesis of the two is best understood in terms of tuning.

There are several examples of localised timbral-harmonic contrasts in 'Michael from Mountains', including the opening gesture, labelled as ‘Intro’ in ex.2.13. The harmony here is a v-I cadence, with an added 2nd in the v chord, but what is far more significant is the switch from a stopped shape on the three high strings over an open C

Ex.2.13 - 'Michael from Mountains' reduction



string to a voicing with the fifth fret on the G string stopped and the other strings open. Mitchell heightens this contrast by moving from a single-note arpeggiated line (albeit a sustained one) for the v in the gesture to a fuller picking-pattern including a few double stops and a decorative melodic alternation between F (5th fret) and C (open) on the highest string for the I chord. So, there is a confluence of harmonic, timbral, and even textural contrast present in the very opening of this song, building a cohesive gesture. Of the gestures and contrasts in the song, this one is perhaps the least tied to the particular tuning in use, but it is nevertheless something that only 'works' to its fullest effect in an open tuning - otherwise, the tonic resolution would have too many stopped notes in it and would possess a radically distinct sound as a result.

The second example of a local timbral-harmonic shift in 'Michael from Mountains' which I wish to highlight is the extended cadence at the end of the chorus (see again Ex.2.13), always accompanying the words "someday I may know you very well". The contrast here takes place at a far faster harmonic rhythm, but is no less crucial. The harmonic movement here is as follows:

$$ii^{add11} \,|\, iii^{7} \,|\, IV^{add9} \,|\, bIII^{add9} \,|\, I$$

This cadence could certainly be viewed through the lens of the gestural benefits of the parallel fifths which run through these harmonies, and indeed through all but the first chord in the chorus. To do so ties this back to scordatura, but it does not provide the whole picture. To do that, some closer inspection of both the move from ii^{add11} to iii^{7} and the move from IV^{add9} to $bIII^{add9}$ and back to I is required. The former progression consists of two strata. The first of these is an open-position minor triad in stopped notes, which is moved in parallel up a tone from ii to iii. The second is a supertonic-dominant pedal (G and C) in open strings. In terms of timbre, this is in the

category of open-against-stopped sounds. The second of these progressions is quite the opposite, as the IV and III 'add9' chords are full barre chords, and the I chord is all open strings, with the G string stopped at the fifth fret and the high C string alternating C and F once more. The timbral contrast between these full barre chords and the open sound (the same as the one established in the introductory gesture) is itself very weighty, but is strengthened by the contrast between the ascent through the substrate-pedal voicings on the ii and iii and the barred IV and bIII. Moreover, the two physical shapes used in this brief progression are two of the most common in Mitchell's music, particularly the shape used in the substrate-pedal ii and iii chords. So, timbre, physical shape and harmonic language are all used as agents of contrast in a short progression.

The more profound timbral and harmonic shifts in 'Michael from Mountains' occur across points of structural delineation. Most distinctive among these is the shift from the Verse to the Bridge. The harmonic contrast is in itself stark, but the timbral juxtaposition of the open sound used in the Verse and the more complex sound used in the Bridge makes the sense of sectional delineation very clear. The verse has hardly any stopped notes, and those only on the upper strings, with many open notes gently cascading over the double pedal bass strings. This openness does much to smooth that which would otherwise be somewhat harsh in the form of the elaborate B-flat minor sixth chord with the added 9th. It is perhaps mysterious and melancholic rather than outright dark. This maximises the gestural weight of the contrast with the bridge, wherein the influence of scordatura is most profoundly felt. The texture here has several noteworthy features. Each and every one of these is directly conditioned by the tuning. Firstly, Mitchell starts to play both of the bass strings in unison. This is only possible because the low strings are in unison. Secondly, she plays the barre chords with an overhand barre across all but the high C string. This is rendered possible (and

necessary) for the same reason. Thirdly, the two guitar tracks on the studio recording diverge slightly for the only time in the song, which becomes necessary because of the need to maintain the pedal. Fourth, the open high C string is used as a syncopated pedal for *both timbral and harmonic purposes*. Most profound of these is the second. The radical shift in physical position required to play an overhand barre cannot be overstated, nor can the sounds that it permits.[32] This is a situation in which the physical configuration of the strings demands radical responses from the performer, a situation which brings into clear focus the physicality of the instrument. The parallel add9 chords sounded in chromatic descent against the high, open pedal C draw particular attention to this. Most of the intervallic structure of the open strings is reproduced in each chord. There is perhaps a reversal here: the physical state of the strings dictates the structure rather than the structure dictating how strings are physically manipulated in its realisation. The open pedal C, sounded invariably off the beat, generates a through-line in the otherwise rather unsubtle sliding chromatic pattern of add9 chords, and does so because of the conditions of the instrument. A very similar process is to be found in the bridge of 'Marcie'. The pedal in its simultaneous sonic demarcation and instrumental logic is crucial to the smoothness of this harmony.

In many ways these two passages illustrate a significant touchstone of the guitar in general, not just scordatura. This is the dipole of 'open' position and the world of the barre chord. There are entire styles which reside almost entirely in the vicinity of these respective poles: consider a campfire acoustic guitarist and their 'cowboy chords' in contrast to the intricate fingerstyle jazz of Joe Pass or Martin Taylor, for whom a quasi-

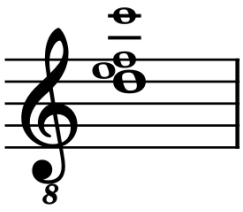
[32] The overhand barre is another of Mitchell's technical peculiarities. The technique is designed to allow the player to barre all of the strings lower in pitch but leave a high open string, something very likely in Mitchell's style. To achieve this, one simply reverses the fretting hand's position, so that the wrist is vertically above the neck, allowing one to barre, in this case, the F,F,C,G and A strings while leaving the high C string open.

pianistic ideal of evenness of tone, balance of interior voices and smoothness of timbre and articulation is paramount.[33]

A final point of analytical interest in 'Michael from Mountains' is the recurrence of the Introduction at the start of the Chorus. This recurrence is made particularly intriguing by the timbral and harmonic uniqueness of the voicing of this v chord. This element interfaces in several significant ways both with the rest of the song and with other moments in the album and indeed Mitchell's later discography. Firstly, it is repeated six times throughout the song.[34] Because of their placement, these repetitions have a gestural and therefore structural function by which they herald each verse and chorus respectively.

It might, furthermore, be beneficial to view this odd sonority as one of Mitchell's 'chords of inquiry' (Mitchell to McKenna 1988, in Whitesell 2008, p.119). I posit this because the sonority functions as a kind of starting-point for each musical and lyrical thought in the song. Such a thing is not especially unique within even this album. Ex.2.14 shows the opening voicing of 'The Dawntreader'. Even though it is a slightly different chord, as it contains the minor seventh, there is much in common between the two gestures. Both are played so that the notes a semitone apart are struck

Ex.2.14 -'The Dawntreader' opening sonority



[33] 'Cowboy chords' refers to the three-finger open position shapes by which one plays the major triads on C, D, E, G and A, as well as minor chords on D, E and A. The prevalence of such shapes in guitar music cannot be overstated, and is responsible for the frequent preponderance of finger-oil (and sweat, string corrosion marks corresponding to their fingerings on well-worn maple fretboards, such as may be found on an early Fender Telecaster.

[34] Furthermore, this extensive repetition at structural waypoints of the minor dominant prepares the ear for bIII with which it has two notes in common. This is the 'substitute' used for the final cadence of the chorus. Thus the common third could well be read as prefiguring, if approaching the song from a more conventional standpoint.

consecutively. Both contain three dissonant stopped notes payed reasonably far up the neck against a bass open string. Both begin songs. Thus this may be viewed as an example of Mitchell's particular harmonic-gestural vocabulary and conceived in particular in relation to her maxim of 'chords of inquiry', especially given its incipit positioning. In light of this idea, one might also note the rough harmonic outline of 'Michael from Mountains' below:

minor-dominant, tonic | verse | bridge | minor-dominant, subdominant | chorus

This may with reason be viewed as a formal device analogous to certain fragmentary Romantic song and miniature forms. The particular *locus classicus* is Schumann's 'Träumerei' from his Op.15 suite *Kinderszenen* (See Ex.2.15). The gesture comprising the anacrusis and the first bar is sounded *at pitch* no fewer than seven times (with some very minor variations and those only in the anacrusis), and at the subdominant pitch once as well. It is largely followed in each instance by a different harmony, a different extension of the gesture. Each of these responses takes the F major gesture as a springboard, each distinct both from the other and from the impetus. Of course there is nothing tonally destabilised about a root-position F major chord in a piece in F major, so the analogy is hardly exact, but it is useful to illustrate the potential for the formal understanding of a gesture whose function is that of a 'springboard' for what follows.[35] In 'Michael from Mountains' the alternation of responses to this nebulous Cm^{add9} sound is in my view best read as a species of this phenomenon of question-and-answer.[36] It is quite fitting really, as in the end Michael remains as unknowable as the

[35] It is also a formal gesture of the sort which might reasonably structure an improvisation, a facet I might argue to be just as relevant to the Schumann as to 'Michael from Mountains' given the gentle fantasia tropes at play in Träumerei and the non-printed musical practices involved in Mitchell's devising of 'Michael from Mountains'.

[36] Though perhaps it is more apt to use Mitchell's own terminology of 'inquiry' here: question-and-answer certainly implies a proper resolution, something this procession of moves away from our inciting chord does not grant at all.

Ex.2.15 - 'Traümerei'



'oil on the puddles in taffeta patterns which run down the drain'. Mitchell is, I suspect, very much aware of how hollow a ring has her declaration that 'someday I may know [him] very well'. I would even argue that the phrase 'chords of inquiry' is a summary of Mitchell's forms. The tuning, itself a 'chord of inquiry', generates further inquiry into its own possibilities, be they barre chords sliding down against a tolling open pedal, or wistful minor dominants ringing out over an open bass.

In sum, this chapter has first laid out some categories of scordatura usage, then demonstrated their interdependence, first theoretically then through the analysis of 'I Had a King' and 'Michael from Mountains', foregrounding several 'habits' of Mitchell's, structural techniques she employs based on scordatura, and some ways of analogising these formal devices to the Western Classical Tradition for explanatory purposes. One of these habits, the use of scordatura to sublimate irregular phrase-groupings and tonally confusing progressions for structural and emphatic effect, is the subject of the next chapter, whose case-studies are 'Marcie' and 'Cactus Tree'.

CHAPTER 3 - SCORDATURA AND SUBLIMATION IN 'MARCIE' AND 'CACTUS TREE'

This chapter is concerned with two more songs from *Song to a Seagull*, namely 'Marcie' and 'Song to a Seagull'. These two songs are prime examples of Mitchell's tendency to exploit the ease with which rhythmically intricate picking patterns can sound mellifluous and 'washy' to generate rhythmic interest in places of harmonic stasis, as well as to generate temporally asymmetrical forms which stretch time to place emphasis on melodic and lyrical apices in subtle ways, a phenomenon present in 'I Had a King' but still more crucial in both of these examples. Furthermore, they demonstrate the different ways in which this sort of structural sleight-of-hand can be brought about. Charles Ford (2019, pp.407-12) has noted in his vocal-centric exploration of the stretching of musical time in Mitchell's songs that these techniques are present across Mitchell's first five albums, as well as mentioning the 2+4 rhythmic structures in 'Cactus Tree' which are crucial in my analysis in Chapter 3 (2). I believe, as in all the analyses in this thesis, that the foregrounding of instrumental concerns provides the opportunity radically to enrich our understanding, especially when the interpenetration of instrumental, harmonic and vocal/textual structural indicators is viewed as the place where 'form' is born in this music.

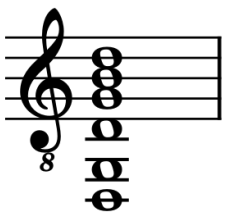
(1) 'MARCIE'

The fourth song from Song to a Seagull, 'Marcie', provides an opportunity both to problematise pre-existing analyses of Mitchell's music and to expand on some aspects raised by the bridge section of 'Michael from Mountains'. Not only does the song feature an analogous chromatic cascade, but it also has been the subject of a passage which brings into extreme focus some of the issues that provided the very impetus for this thesis. The passage, from a 2020 article by Brian Lloyd, is reproduced here.

> I started with "Marcie," the fourth track on the album. On a guitar in standard tuning, I played and sang the first verse, then paused to write the chord sequence on the board [Bb – A^7 – Am^7 – G – G^{sus} – G (twice), then Eb – D – C – B – Bb – A^7 – Am^7 – G – G^{sus} – G]. I played it again while humming the tune to highlight the complexity of the chord structure and the relationship between that structure and the notes Mitchell chose to form the melody. If this sounds beautiful to you, I told the students, then this is how musical beauty is created. Then I said "and that ain't the half of it" and played the song's bridge-like passage (And summer goes. . .), pausing again to put these chords (Bm – C – Bm – C – G – A – Am^7 – G – G^{sus} – G) up for students to see. Now we could take the measure of the whole song–see, in particular, that it was made up of distinct musical ideas woven together.
>
> (2020, p. 116)

The first issue here is that 'Marcie' *is not played in standard tuning.* This simple problem can lead to a paucity of understanding. The actual tuning used in 'Marcie', the same as is used in 'The Gallery' (Mitchell 1969, Track 6), is shown in Ex.2.16. Both of the first two progressions Lloyd outlines can be understood in rich ways through scordatura. In the case of the second, these benefits are particularly clear. Lloyd is in my view quite correct in his reading of this passage as 'Eb – D – C – B – Bb – A^7 – Am^7 – G' (Ibid), and yet in demonstrating the progression in standard tuning he has obfuscated the crucial connective tissue in this chromatic cascade. Note in Ex.2.16 the simple wide-spaced ('open-position' would in the context of this analysis introduce unnecessary confusion so I avoid it) G-major voicing formed by the low G, the second D string, and the B. These three-note wide voicings are the secret ingredient to the performance and indeed the very sound of this progression. Ex.2.17 shows a harmonic reduction of the exact voicings in this passage, with stopped notes in small noteheads and open strings in full-size. The open G (4th string) is present almost throughout the passage, and I have parenthesised these notes for emphasis due to this near-omnipresence. Indeed, the string is absent only in the D and B chords, which are audibly 'stopped' chords, and over which guitar melodies are played on the top two strings. The remaining harmonies all contain this persistent, ever-ringing copper-wound G string. The very paucity of ways of thinking to explain this kind of phenomenon is in large part the impetus for this thesis. The progressions between the first three pairs of chords (Eb^{maj7} to D, C^{add9} to B, and Bb^6 to A^7) are a good example

Ex.2.16 - 'Marcie' tuning

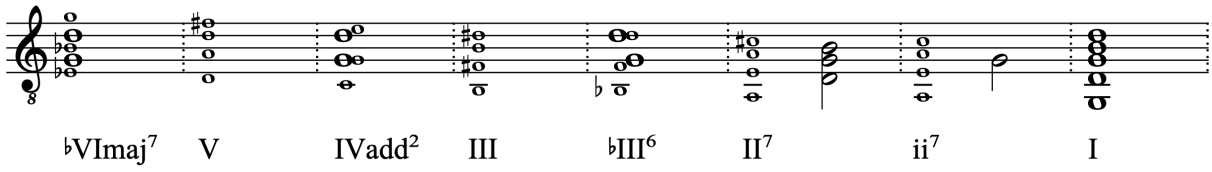


of this. One *could* describe these progressions as being governed exclusively by the parallel tenths with some inner-voice extensions. This would be sound enough on the page, save for the profound timbral contrasts between the stratum-pedal voicing used for the E-flat and C chords and the barre voicing used for the chords of D and B. This textural contrast is strengthened yet further by the open upper D string which is struck on an offbeat against the chords of Eb and C. Particularly characteristic of the stratum-pedal voicings are the dissonances of a major seventh over the root and a major ninth in the same octave as the third formed by the D string in the E-flat and C chords. The 'unresolved' quality to this dissonance of a major second between a stopped string and an open one, as is found at the top of the C^9 voicing and in the middle of the Bb^6 voicing, is still more noteworthy, because of the very proximity of it: here are two radically distinct timbres occupying the same registral space (and indeed adjacent physical space, in the sense that the strings are usually physically next to one another).[37] One might view this passage in terms of the gestural interplay, then, between the stable (conventional?) barre chords of D, B, and A, and a series of examples of Mitchell's 'chords of inquiry' (Mitchell and Marom, 2014, pp.75-6), each of which features an open string forming a *different* dissonance against the simple major chord played in the stratum.

The harmonic structures of this passage are highly convenient for the player, provided the player plays in the original tuning. Ex.2.18 shows the basic chord shapes in Open G tablature, atop which Mitchell does play some decorative and melodic content, but hardly *difficult* melodic content. This is a noteworthy example of the ease-of-use factor in Mitchell's use of tunings. In other words it demonstrates the ways in

[37] The use of these dissonances of a (major) second between separate timbres is by no means unique to Mitchell, and although its expressive impact is quite variable it is inevitably rather distinctive. A particularly striking example of this in another field would be the climactic deployment of 9-8 suspensions in the highest register of the second soprano, immediately beneath the major third in the first soprano part. This is not only particularly common but particularly easy to note, to the point of its being almost cliché, in 8-part *stile antico* madrigals and motets from the late-17th century and onwards. The two most (in)famous examples of this are probably Robert Lucas Pearsall's *Lay a Garland* and Antonio Lotti's *Crucifixus etiam pro nobis*.

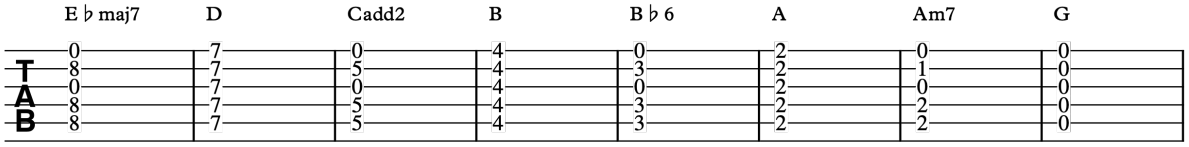
Ex.2.17 - 'Marcie' cascade reduction



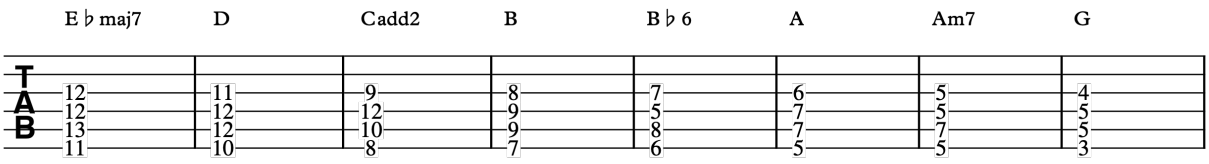
which the tuning makes such harmonic choices likely, convenient, logical, as well as governing what is *un*likely and inconvenient. The demonstration of the 'correctness' of this might work as follows. The shapes in Ex.2.18 are quite physically simple to play. It is clearly the right tuning, the right shapes, the right positions etc, and yet the 'reverse-engineering' of such a performance would seem somewhat unlikely, were it not for the extraordinarily *present* (there is a distinct physicality to their difference from stopped strings) and entirely pervasive open strings. One can divine this tuning or at least another tuning where this passage works fairly well with relative *ease* by simply asking which notes are produced on open strings. Ex.2.19 illustrates the problems encountered when attempting to play the same voicings, which I have done my best to duplicate precisely, in standard tuning. The C^{add9} voicing in particular is not without significant physical discomfort and is hardly a 'logical' one. Certainly one could play the D in the E flat major-seventh chord (and the C^{add9} chord in fact) down the octave on an open string and achieve a distinctive effect, but it would also be far from the *same* effect. The registral disposition of the harmonies, the fact that it would be a *wound* pedal D sounding, the slightly awkward sound of a last-inversion major-seventh where the seventh is on an open string and all other notes are stopped, all these would indicate, at the very least, a slightly awkward approach to such a harmonic language as this in standard tuning. Moreover, the pedal would be moving around between different strings, obscuring its effect as a harmonic and timbral through line.

When played in Open G some other facets of this progression become visible, simply from the hand-positions of the player. From this I wish to illustrate a sense in which the guiding principles in visible play within Mitchell's voice leading have something in common with Fuxian voice-leading principles. I mean by principles far more of an attitudinal sense of the word than a rule-following one. These attitudes are indeed worked-out highly differently in Mitchell's music than in Gradus ad Parnassum (Fux, 1725). What is common, ultimately, in these workings out, is the presence of a desire for *maximal smoothness.* In a passage as laced with parallelisms as this it would seem at first glance to be patently absurd to state that *maximal smoothness* is at play in a voice-leading analysis sense, as that term tends to imply *parsimonious* voice leading, which this is not. Certainly the rules of Gradus ad Parnassum are hardly obeyed. And yet there is smoothness here, to the extent that I would view it as a governing principle. Unidirectional stepwise motion towards the tonic certainly plays into it, but I would view the smoothness as being generated as much by the presence of timbral unifiers as by this concerted pitch-directionality. These timbral unifiers are unsurprisingly the very same 'colour' tones in the harmony, the nigh-ubiquitous open G and D strings. These

Ex.2.18 - 'Marcie' cascade chord shapes in original tuning



Ex.2.19 - attempted reproduction of 'Marcie' cascade in standard guitar tuning



two facets have a combined effect which generates a great degree of direction and smoothness. These juxtapositions of parallelisms against pedals are very prevalent in Mitchell's early guitar songs and contribute not inconsiderably to harmonic 'interest' in this period.[38] In sum, from this passage a little more can be gleaned about the fundamental importance of scordatura in the intersection of individual timbral/ harmonic moments, as well as its importance to progressions *between* these instances. One might even go on to characterise these kinds of progressions as possessing a scordatura-conditioned 'physical voice-leading'.

This idea can be expounded upon through a closer inspection of the precise picking-patterns Mitchell uses in this passage. Ex.2.20 is a full transcription of a whole verse-unit (the second, in particular) and the introduction of 'Marcie'. The progression from Eb down to G is found at bb.15-22. Three further things emerge from this which serve to emphasise all I have noted above. Firstly, the syncopated emphasis on the open D string in bars 15, 17 and 19 increases its gestural weight. Secondly, the incorporation of a small portion of melodic content over the stopped harmonies in bars 16, 18 and 20, melodic content which occurs in the voice also, serves to delineate these harmonies yet further from the non-melodic open voicings. Thirdly, bars 16, 18 and 20 all have some kind of open-string upbeat towards the following bar. In b.16 this is only the final attack, a lower open D, while in b.18 it is the middle G string and the B string, and in b.20 it is the lower open D, the middle G string and the B string, making a full G major triad. So, despite the contrasting stopped sonority of the barre chords, every measure of this cascading gesture features members of the tonic triad,

[38] In fact, Mitchell carries this rough principle far into what might loosely be deemed her piano-phase or at the very least her piano style. I have previously made mention of the stylistic commonality in voicing structure between 'Blue' and the various pianists who circled around the Miles Davis Quintet. The double-pedal/parallel-triad combination is a particular feature of her stylings on that album, shared to some degree with those pianists. It differs of course from the guitar voicing structures quite significantly in that the piano structures are very widely vertically spaced. Mitchell employs polychordal voicing strategies rather than internal dissonances most of the time on this album, yet the principle is not in fact dissimilar, merely adapted for instrumental vagaries, or simply taught by the instrument.

which are all sounded on open strings. Not only are they tonally 'home', they are timbrally 'home' as well.

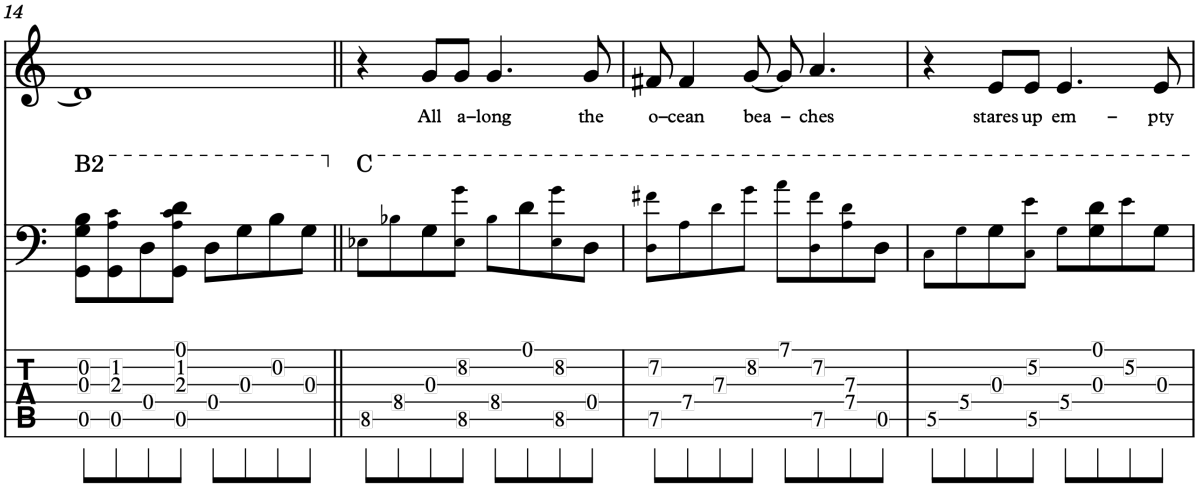
Scordatura is, furthermore, integral to the verse-level form of 'Marcie', a form which, much like in 'I Had a King', owes the sublimation of its many idiosyncrasies to the timbral properties of the scordatura in use. The form, as far as the guitar part is concerned is built up of only four different units, which I have called A, B1, B2, and C. In Ex.2.20 I have labelled each of these. The vocal phrases, of which there are also four, do not precisely correspond to these cellular pieces of guitar writing. However, three of them (phrases 1, 2 and 4) correspond to a statement of A + B1, while the third fits in exactly with C. B2, then, is structurally interstitial, and responsible for the irregularities of sectional length. The objective of the next section of this analysis is to explain precisely how scordatura is so effective in *sublimating* these irregularities.

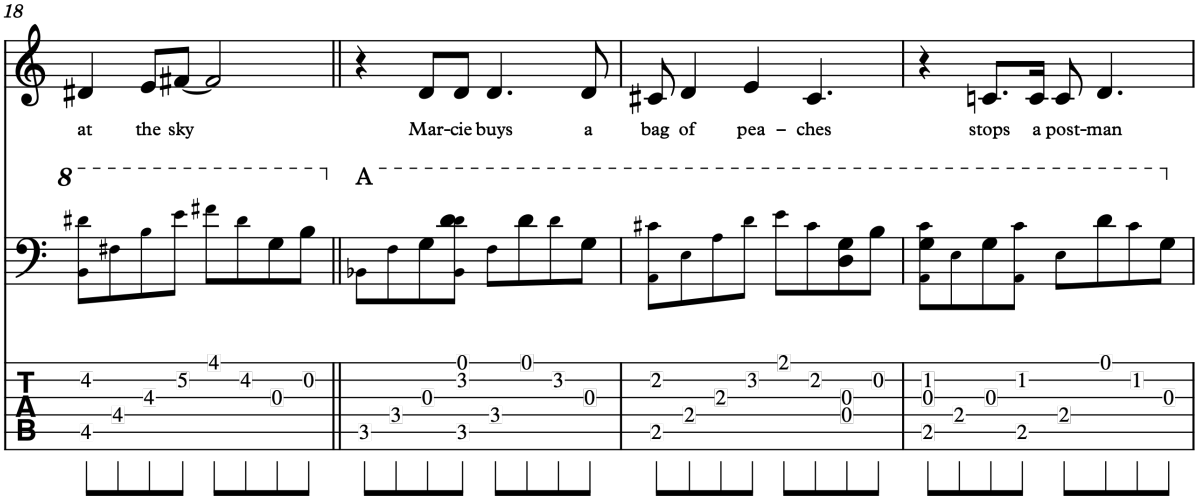
These irregularities are certainly reminiscent of the 17-bar sections of 'I Had a King' and have similar links to the scordatura the song is played in. They are not, however, identical in mechanism by any means. Whereas the guitar part in 'I Had a King' sets up overlapping, tessellated patterns through vertical stratification of timbres and through harmonic ambiguity, this section of 'Marcie' is built on repeatable characteristics of the picking pattern in b.4 and its gently oscillatory I-V tonic pedal feel. This is ultimately a *linear* (i.e temporal, non-concurrent) timbral juxtaposition, rather than, as in 'I Had a King', a *vertical* one based on sub-strata.

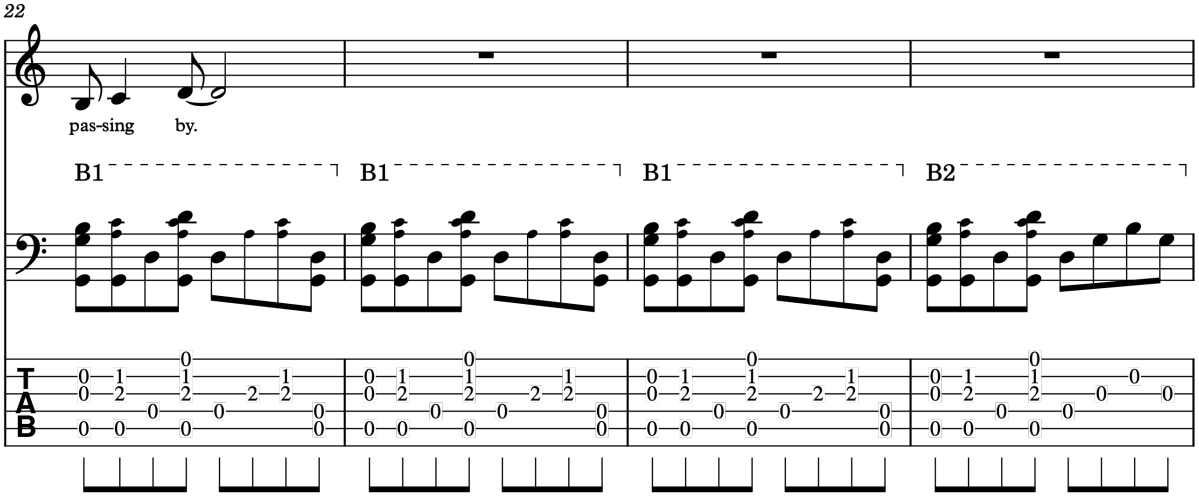
On first glance, it seems as though the first line of Ex.2.20 is a simple 4-bar phrase, to be repeated or moved on from. Yet Mitchell immediately repeats the 4th bar with a variation, creating a curious 5-bar phrase unit. Aside from the descent, which is its own discrete 4-bar unit, this 5-bar introduction contains everything played in this 25-bar section, in an interesting fashion. To describe this it is best to cut this opening 5

Ex.2.20 - 'Marcie' transcription




14
All a–long the o–cean bea – ches stares up em – pty
B2
C


18
at the sky Mar-cie buys a bag of pea – ches stops a post-man
8
A


22
pas-sing by.
B1
B1
B1
B2

bars up into pieces. The first 3 bars form a discrete unit 'A', while bar 4 and bar 5 are units B1 and B2 respectively. Describing the formal units brings several things into focus. Firstly, the economy of material is quite remarkable. Secondly, the timings of the phrases are irregular. Thirdly, with the exception of the beginning, A and C are always preceded by B2, a unit characterised *against* B1 by its open G-major arpeggiated figure in its final three quaver attacks. B2 thus has a gestural function of precipitating transition, be that back to the main melodic phrase of the verse, A, or into the C unit, and even into the still-more distinct material at 'and summer goes' which is heard later in the song.

All of this does little to explain why this irregularity of phrase structure is so innocuous and so subtle. The first piece of the puzzle is the B2 segment, which might reasonably be viewed in the same sort of light as the minor dominant gesture in 'Michael from Mountains' in that it precedes three different segments of material over the course of the song: it has an inherently introductory and interstitial function. The second element is the looping of B1 in bb.22-4. B1 is a kind of self-contained cyclic gesture, and in this sense it functions as a 'vamp' between verses rather than as a part of the verse per se. This 'vamp' quality is, in my view, quite closely bound to the open tuning, because Mitchell establishes the *sound* of the open tuning as 'home'. It is a very easy, very obvious gesture, which serves almost as 'holding music', while the pedal keeps the sense of a need for 'resolution' at bay. The third piece is that the 5-bar phrase in bb.10-14 is designed with a kind of 'travel' towards the descending C section, wherein greater anticipation of the new material is created by means of the delay.

There is a curious intersection between these scordatura-lengthened gestures and another style of 20th-century American popular song. 'Marcie', or at least this section of 'Marcie', has basically the same formal building blocks as a 32-bar song form, or AABA form. We hear a phrase, a repeat of the phrase (possibly varied), move

to a new tonal area and hear a new phrase which returns us to the original area, and hear the original phrase again. These are the same form. What is different is the means by which the 'travel' away to the 'B' section is achieved, and the way that the variation between the three 'A' sections is created. One side-effect of the *means* of travel away to the 'B' section in 'Marcie' is that the *destination* is a different one from the usual AABA tonal travel, which tends to be to V or some substitution.

Ex.2.21 shows a lead sheet for Rodgers and Hart's 'My Funny Valentine' which can be taken as a paradigm of the Tin Pan Alley 32-bar song form. I do not wish to imply that it is prototypical, but rather a sort of deluxe version with all the trimmings. Yet my selection of this song is rather designed to show two very different means of leaping off from the same core structure, and to show the integral role of scordatura in Mitchell's interpretation of that basic formal outline, as opposed to the taut 'tonal' expansion of the form which Rodgers employs. To do this, a summary analysis of 'My Funny Valentine' is required. The first noteworthy thing about 'My Funny Valentine' as far as its relationship to thirty-two bar song form is concerned is that it isn't 32 bars long, but rather thirty five.[39] The final three measures of the song are a coda in the relative major, providing a tonal resolution to the processes which lead to the registral and emphatic apex reached in b.31-32.

This coda element harkens back to the song's origins as a very slow show tune. With the introduction from the stage version (which concludes 'my truthful, sincere and slightly dopey gent, you're'), the song is long enough not to require any repeats in its original theatrical context. So, there is a distinction in the structural *scale* at which these interpretations of 32-bar song form are playing out. Where in 'Marcie' this pattern is heard fully four times, in the original and slow version of 'My Funny Valentine', the pattern is the whole song. This accounts for the first immediate and

[39] When "My Finny Valentine" is performed in a jazz context as a 'standard' an extra bar with a II - V in C minor is added, closing off the form and also functioning as a turnaround.

obvious difference between the two, the harmonic rhythm. The remaining distinctions all very much exist within the questioning framework of 'what *kind* of variation' and 'what *kind* of intensification'. Rodgers' methods are perhaps easier to divine, or at the very least to explain. The first two eight-bar units, A1 and A2, are extremely closely related. The same underlying harmony, for example, is heard in bb.1-6 and bb.9-14. The variation between these two corresponding six-bar units is achieved through the transposition of the tune up a diatonic third, plus a little melodic decoration in b.14. Bb.7-8 and bb.15-6 are similarly closely related. Both are II-V progressions with a half-diminished seventh for the II, allowing for a reading of A-flat-minor with an added sixth as a substitution for a half-diminished seventh on F.[40] The only difference is that they are in different keys, C minor and E-flat major respectively. The variation between the A1-A2 and B sections is essentially achieved through first a new key and also a far more linear and active bass line in B. The section is reached through the aforementioned II-V progression. The A3 section derives its variation and gestural weight first through a compression of the variation process employed between A1 and A2, and then through a transposition up the octave of the initial motive to an unresolved climax on the clear gestural apex of the song, the high E-flat bb.31-2.[41] The subsequent resolution is structurally based on the dramatic design of the song: the impassioned climactic cry of 'stay little valentine stay' is followed, huskily and desperately, by a subdued IV-II-V-I in E-flat to the words 'each day is valentine's day'. Rodgers uses very efficient techniques of harmonic tension-building to create both widespread 'atmosphere' and localised contrasts and emphases. These are almost invariably, save for the compressed variation trick, *vertical* techniques.

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[40] It seems reasonable enough to read the minor sixth chord of the fourth degree as a substitute voicing for the half-diminished on the second degree, i.e A-flat-minor sixth is a substitute for F-minor seventh with a flatted fifth.

[41] Melodically, bb.25-6 repeats bb.1-2 while bb.27-8 repeats bb.9-10, however *harmonically* this is simply a repeat of bb.1-4 or bb.9-12. The melodic intensification is crammed into half the time in one sense and a fifth of it in another.

Ex.2.21 - 'My Funny Valentine' lead sheet



The vertical is far from the complete story in 'Marcie'. As already noted, the profound timbral shift moving into the 'descent' section (unit C) both smooths out and heightens the sudden move to an E-flat harmony, yet Mitchell leaves space for the listener to prepare for this sudden shift through a place-holding instance of B1 (b.14) between the A part of the second phrase and the glue-gesture, B2. This generates an anticipatory feeling in the second phrase. In short, in 'Marcie' the anticipation-building techniques are *horizontal* in the form of added units of time, whole bars in the

indeterminately open (and scordatura -centric) sonic space of the B1 bar, which could (and can, and does) repeat as many times as one cared for. These anticipatory techniques are not the whole story of this section, however.

'Marcie' is distinct from the first two songs I have discussed in this chapter in its relatively sparing use of the 'pure' or 'almost pure' open chord. In 'Marcie' this 'pure' open sonority is sufficiently characterised from a formal and gestural standpoint as to be locally very recognisable as open, as *home*, as repeatable *ad infinitum*. There are numerous ways in which Mitchell plays the song that lean into this. For example, in the first three bars, every stopped note is sounded *against* the homeliness of the open strings. The song does not even start in the home key of G, and this is crucial to its gestural and formal design. Every time Mitchell sings anything 'busier' than a long, held note, the harmony is comprised of a stopped chord with an open string as some extension, be it sixth or seventh or ninth, or purely stopped harmony. This creates a relative uniformity across the 'A' and 'C' units, a uniformity so profound that I treated them as a contiguous unit in my problematisation of pre-existing analyses and, as a self-contained demonstration of scordatura-centric harmonic design; this is quite valid. From the formal standpoint I am currently concerned with, however, the structural line which this elegant run-on crosses, and the ease with which it makes the traverse, are proof of the pudding. The timbral link is the prevalence of triad-against-open-pedal, the picking-out of the vocal line at certain moments when playing a full barre chord. Against this obvious stopped-ness and concurrent bitterness of all of the semiotically-charged sung sections, the open sound of B1 and B2 function as a sort of liminal area. They do not carry any sort of text for the most part, but rather are interjections, pauses, returns home, breathing-places between the busy and bitter text and its stopped and complex harmony, its more constrained and moving timbre. All of

this is built into the way Mitchell treats the sound-of-the-tuning as 'home' and 'interruption' at the same time, and thus glues the song together.

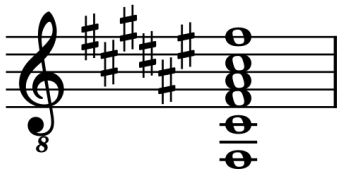
(2) 'CACTUS TREE'

In the examples I have used thus far I have not been especially concerned with rhythms below the level of the bar. In large part this has been unnecessary, due to the relatively straightforward rhythmic structures of the songs in question. In 'Cactus Tree', however, the question of the intersection of scordatura and rhythm takes centre stage. A few preliminary thoughts before the rhythmic intricacies are laid bare. Several observations about the tuning and the way I have notated the song are required. 'Cactus Tree' is played in an open D tuning with a capo on the fourth fret, transposing the tuning up a major third and resulting in an effective tuning of Open F#, which is printed in Ex.2.22. In lieu of tablature, I will note from the outset that the song is played entirely in an open position, with no barre chords whatsoever. This position is very significant in making possible every aspect of the guitar style. Secondly, 'Cactus Tree' is both the longest and the most repetitive song on the album. It is five strophic verses, all essentially the same. Therefore I shall print one instance of the strophe. Thirdly, a note on the mood of the song. The 'lady in the city' is basically concerned with chronicling all of 'the men who want to possess her and in some way she wants to possess' (Karppinen 2016, p. 58). Karppinen cites Marilyn Adler Papayanis to note that the declaration of this song is one of 'the freedom, always the privilege of men, to live for herself' (Papayanis 2010, p. 649). The motoric bustling of the guitar part, its strophic inexorability and the incessant ringing of the open strings form a compelling 'fit' for this declaration.

A note on the importance of the capo is also worthwhile at this juncture. Were I asked to create an arrangement of this song's guitar part for standard tuning I should struggle to capture its effect. This is simply because one of the most important ingredients in this song is that the left hand needs to do almost nothing. Only five

shapes, including playing all the open strings without using the left hand at all, are required, with a modicum of sliding between them, which is itself an integral part of the sound from the introduction onwards. The open tuning makes it extremely straightforward to play the song in such a manner - and this at the core of its character - as to maximise the amount of time the strings ring out for. The lulling qualities, the sliding, the gentle rhythmic disorientations, the stretching of time in the build-up to the melodic climax, all of these things are quite implausible without this ringing-out of the upper and middle strings. However, in order properly to generate the sound of 'Cactus Tree'[42], one has to use a capo on the fourth fret. There are several reasons this is the case. First is the alignment of key with the singer's voice. This is true to the point of triviality. What is more interesting is the effect of the capo on the *timbre* of the song. If played down a major third in the open D tuning to which the capo-less guitar is

Ex.2.22 - 'Cactus Tree' tuning



tuned in this song, two significant differences emerge, aside from the pitch. The first is that the guitar becomes *too resonant*. The sustain of every open note becomes rather excessive, most of the rhythmic definition may be lost, etc. This is largely due to the very thick piece of wound steel which is left open and unimpeded at the base of the texture. The bass predominates and largely is overpowering, to the point of sounding boomy.The rhythmic subtleties blur and one is left with mud. I do not wish to suggest that these are 'insoluble problems' though. One could employ some judicious muting

[42] Another famous example would be The Beatles' 'Here Comes the Sun', which is played with a capo on the seventh fret and open position chords, and is similarly dependent on a kind of bright ringing for its distinctive timbral effect.

and a thumb-pick to brighten and slightly stifle the bass, for example. One could simply *play more softly*. However, both of these things would radically alter the sound of the song. The bass does need to 'boom': but not too much. The capo enables the intricacies and the rhythms and the washing and the tolling to take place, but it moderates this latter and most potent element. This is largely due to the capo's acoustic 'infelicities'. Essentially the capo functions by fretting all the strings at a specific point on the neck. If it is placed just behind the fourth fret, for example, then one is playing up a major third. This essentially means the fret is acting as a substitute for the nut. Yet there are very significant differences between the nut and the fret. The nut is designed to provide maximum sustain but does not need to allow for vibrato or bending or other such microtonal nuances of guitar playing. The fret *does* need to for allow these things, and this inhibits the sustaining characteristics of the strings a small amount. Strum an open chord with a capo on and the sound is different from a true open chord. It is a touch brighter to my ears, and rings for a little less time. These acoustically 'sub-optimal' characteristics of a capo are entirely integral to this complex 'open' picking pattern.

The above initial conditions in mind, I have printed a transcription of this song as Ex.2.23. The lower voice on the guitar stave contains notes which, to the best of my ability as both analyst and guitarist, I have judged to be struck with the right thumb.[43] The timbral distinction between a thumb-stroke and a finger-stroke is not invariably a wide one. It can be, and indeed often is, minimised, but here it is emphasised, with the bass left to ring quite a lot, emphasising the textural stratification. I must note that this transcription in particular owes a good deal to a pre-existing tablature transcription by Les Irvin, on the song's transcription page on jonimitchell.com. The principal modification, aside from the use of staff notation, has been the change to a 2/4 time

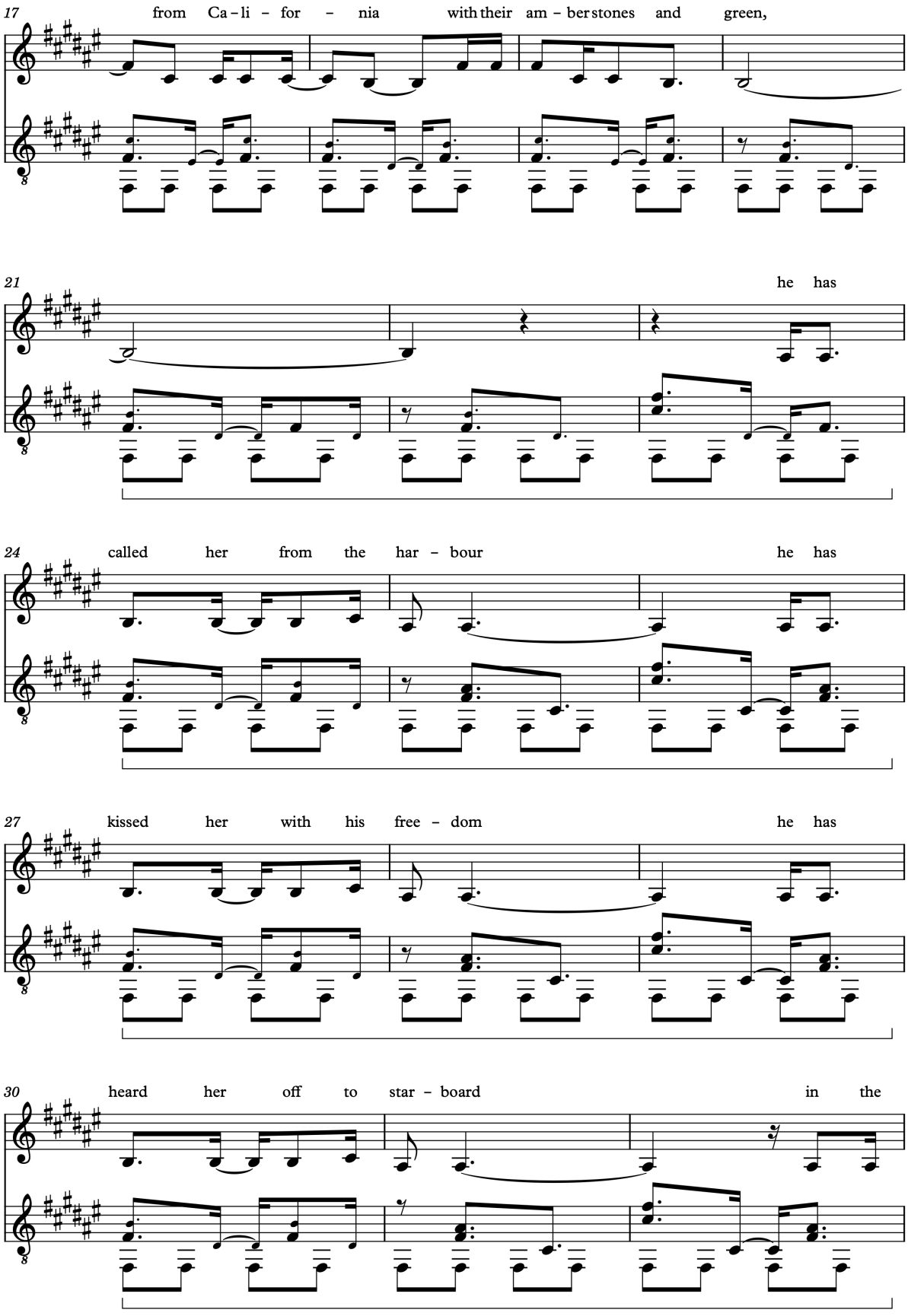
[43] Based largely on tabs from jonimitchell.com which I have checked at length by playing them myself.

signature. This I have done for two reasons. To begin with, the greater frequency of barlines increases legibility in the midst of the syncopations. The second reason is an analytical observation which occupies a later portion of this chapter, but concerns another of Mitchell's subtle temporal expansions which I find is more neatly expressed in terms of changing hyper-metre in 2/4 than in contrasts of 4/4 and 6/4. Therefore, I present 'Cactus Tree' in 2/4 as Ex.2.23. The other thing I have altered from that transcription is the frequency of bass attacks. Irvin prints them as a complex pattern of syncopations, which is, as I have divined from some video footage of Mitchell performing the song in 1970 (see endnotes) as well as a closer inspection of the album version, incorrect. Rather, Mitchell strikes the bass on every quaver, with the syncopations playing against this pedal, save in the sections where the texture is moved up to the higher strings.

The first thing which may be observed from Ex.2.23 is that 'Cactus Tree' is prickling with anticipatory syncopations. Mostly these anticipatory syncopations occur in the upper portion of the texture, played with the fingers rather than the thumb. Secondly, the anticipatory syncopations create small-scale melodic gestures between pairs of strings or even groups which, when left to ring, create a very busy system of close, rather lush 'dissonance'. Mitchell favours in particular a neighbour-note gesture between adjacent strings that creates a gentle dissonance as well as a great deal of rhythmic drive in the context of a relatively slow song. The anticipations also frequently anticipate the *bass* voice, which, save for a few moments, is always plodding away on the open low F#. This magnifies the motoric style of the song, while also, by being left to ring, furthering the 'washy' high portions of the harmony and texture. This is a texture that depends wholly on the scordatura Mitchell plays in to function. Therefore, the scordatura can be perceived as exercising an even more pronounced

Ex.2.23 - 'Cactus Tree' transcription




17
from Ca – li – for – nia with their am – ber stones and green,
21
he has
24
called her from the har – bour he has
27
kissed her with his free – dom he has
30
heard her off to star – board in the


33
brea – king and the brea – thing of the
35
wa – ter weeds while
39
she was bu – sy be – ing free
41
43

conditioning effect on the guitar texture, and therefore the 'composition', than is normally to be found in Mitchell's early output.

In the midst of all the rhythmic complexity Mitchell employs a slightly more varied approach to the stratification of the texture than in other songs. The 'stopped strata' are not as closely bound together as they might be, essentially. Instead, moments of simultaneity between stopped notes are somewhat rare within the guitar texture of 'Cactus Tree'. Mitchell establishes quite quickly as a textural lodestone the alternation of the second and third strings through the F#-E# pattern in the first bar. The former is open, the latter not. This semitone and its gently overlapping qualities are greatly furthered by the timbral distinction between the two strings. This merging of the open and stopped into a fairly contiguous wash of gentle dissonance and forward rhythm across strings 2, 3, and 4 is a curious and distinct approach compared to, say, 'Marcie' and especially 'I Had a King'. There are however some notable uses of the stratified effect in this song. The upper two strings (C# and F#) are often plucked open as a pair, always on beat 3. In these moments nothing is really likely to interfere with their ringing-out, so these sounds persist for far longer than a score is readily able to indicate. There is a bell-like quality to these attacks to my ear, which may simply be a product of the manner Mitchell plucks the strings and leaves them largely unimpeded above the bustling texture in the lower strings. To reiterate, none of this 'works' without the scordatura the song was written and played in. The timbral quality of the 1-7 alternations in the middle of the texture relies on the bass and third-lowest strings being tuned an octave apart. Similarly, the ringing upper double pedal would not 'ring' in at all a similar fashion if one had to stop it. Thus, the two highest strings must be a twelfth and two octaves above the bass for such a texture to 'work'. This already imposes conditions on four of the six strings. It is difficult to stress to the non-guitarist reader the profound 'rightness' of the way Mitchell uses the scordatura she plays in.

Everything fits in a highly logical fashion, resting easily under both hands, even when it is 'difficult' in conventional terms. Nothing feels physically strained or taxing despite the often-vast amount of sonic information being produced.

Having established the general textural parameters at play in 'Cactus Tree', I will discuss the manner in which these small-scale details govern and generate the macro-rhythmic nuances present in this highly sophisticated part. These are set up by the propulsive bass pedal and the omnipresence of syncopation thereupon. Mitchell employs for the purposes of sublimating an extraordinary rhythmic effect in bb.21-32. To understand this fully some consideration of the structure of the text is also useful.

'Cactus Tree' follows a neat lyrical pattern of three couplets followed by four unrhymed but related lines (usually the first three more related than the fourth), followed by a short line for the apex, and then 'while she was busy being free' (with some slight variations). In all cases, the lines contain a two-syllable anacrusis, which is employed in the song.[44] The lyrics fall into quite an interesting pattern by themselves. Treating the text of verse one, printed below, as 'a poem' for a moment, it consists of three initial couplets, three closely related single lines, another couplet, and the closing 'end-rhyme'.[45]

There's a man who's been out sailing - In a decade full of dreams

And he takes her to a schooner - And he treats her like a queen

Bearing beads from California - With their amber stones and green

[44] Mitchell's vocal delivery is full of slight rhythmic shifts and odd anticipations which I do not trust staff notation as used here to express in their fullest detail. Fortunately, while these intricacies are of sufficient interest as to fill a thesis of their own, they are largely tangential to the purposes of this example. I have thus opted for a reasonable balance of legibility and exactitude.

[45] It seems to me that 'end-rhyme' is the best formal analogue for this kind of stanza-closing single-line refrain because it accounts for its gestural function, which seems to me quite in line with what an 'end-rhyme' achieves in a baroque binary form.

He has called her from the harbour

He has kissed her with his freedom

He has heard her off to starboard

In the breaking and the breathing - Of the water weeds

While she was busy being free

Each of these lines, including the second lines of the couplets, begins with an anacrusis, which mirrors the anticipatory nature of most of the middle-string playing in the guitar part. What is far more significant about it is that by virtue of these anacruses the vocal signposts the *down* beats. These downbeats are already clear for the first three couplets, with each couplet occupying a four-bar phrase unit, in the section bb.9-20. Bb.21-32, however, presents some challenges. The expectation established by the first three couplets would indicate that b.21 should contain the main body of a new line of text. Instead, Mitchell prolongs the B major chord for two additional bars, while sustaining a B on the word 'green', then plays the highest two open strings together against a third additional bar of the B major shape (although the B itself is not struck in b.23), before finally singing the expected vocal anacrusis in the second half of b.23 and continuing the phrase into bb.24-5. The following three phrases are all three bars in length (bb.24-6, 27-9, 30-2), and use precisely the same guitar accompaniment as one another. The final vocal phrase is distinct, too, being 6 bars long. As in 'Marcie', however, the most intriguing point about this structure is not that it is present, but the degree to which it is sublimated.

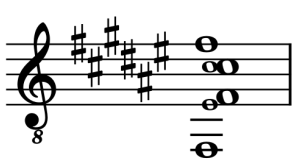
This structure is enabled by several subtle nuances of Mitchell's guitar playing. Most prominently tied to the lyrical structure is the simultaneous striking of the high

C# and F# open strings. The rhythmic placement of this salient gesture is of paramount importance, as it is tied in with all of the vocal anacruses of the song. For the first two (bb.8, 12) these strings are struck on the downbeat of the bar, a pattern which is returned to in bb.23, 26, 29, 32 and 38. It is varied slightly, however, in b.16, at the start of the phrase 'bearing beads from California with their amber stones and green'. This contributes significantly to an anticipatory feel to bb.17-22, an anticipation which is rewarded by the 'signposting' double upper pedal on the downbeat of b.23. Mitchell also generates variation through these subtle nuances of playing. Aside from bb.15-16 and bb.34-8, the song is built on only three individual chord shapes (Ex.2.24), all sounding over a rhythmic tonic pedal on the low open F# string. Variation is achieved entirely by the fingers (i.e *not the thumb*) of the right hand in the main bulk of the song. This is done by the persistent recombination of three individual and distinct patterns of syncopation. These are first heard in b.1 (syncopation A), b.2 (syncopation B), and b.9 (syncopation C). The first uses of these syncopations are marked in Ex.2.23. All of them are initially associated with the physical chord-shape α. What is of structural import here, however, is the fashion in which b.20 functions as a linking-bar integrated into the end of what we initially perceive as a four-bar phrase. Harmonically speaking, the bar completes a four-bar alternating pattern of α and β. In terms of the alternating patterns of syncopations, however, it reintroduces the syncopation A which has not been heard since the introduction at this point. It also begins a process which appears until b.23 to be a four-bar repeat (bb.20-23) of the syncopation pattern from bb.1-8, a pattern of A-B-A-B. In this sense it functions as a kind of 'return' to the gesture at the beginning of the song. Therefore, we can view b.20 as a kind of 'pivot' bar which is the beginning of one clearly-demarcated four-bar unit *and the beginning of the next one.* This has quite significant precedent in other songs discussed in this thesis. In b.23, which turns out to

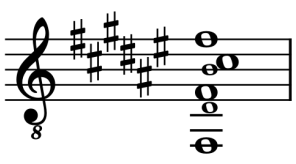
be syncopation C rather than the expected B, Mitchell strikes the upper-double-pedal in anticipation of the anacrusis in the vocal line, marking the *end* of a unit as well as the *beginning* of the next. Thus, Mitchell generates a confluence of formal stretching, persistent driving rhythms, and the sublimation of metric regularities, through the use of b.20 as a pivot. Here we are working a few structural levels up from the fundamental conditioning element, scordatura, so it is worth reiterating the layers. The combination of scordatura and capo has brought about a situation wherein a consistent open bass pedal is not boomy, but rather generates a solid, yet hardly overpowering, rhythmic driving-force, upon which complex rhythmic structures can be built. The tuning is also high enough that 1-7 dissonances in inner voices are quite tenable without being muddy (see shape α). Furthermore, the sustaining characteristics of open strings and this scordatura in particular have encouraged or at the least permitted a complex rhythmic structure in the inner voices to be sublimated by a gentle 'washiness'. These complex rhythms have in turn been used to map on to structural units within the song, in conjunction with the anacruses in the vocal line, as well as the double upper pedal. These sublimations at the level of individual bars, as well as the gestural weight of the double upper pedal and the vocal anacrusis, permit a sublimation of Mitchell's highly irregular phrase groupings.

Back at the higher structural level, the phrase units which begin in b.24 are, as I have noted previously, three bars long. Mitchell cannot possibly have prefigured this with former three-bar units which have mapped onto vocal entries. However, the pivot

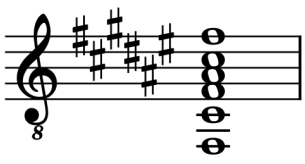
Ex.2.24a - shape α



Ex.2.24b - shape β



Ex.2.24c - shape γ



function of b.20 has one more piece of structural influence. The listener is likely at first to perceive bb.20-22 as a gestural repeat of the first 3 bars, and perhaps even b.23. However, looking at bb.21-23 as its own unit, as the lines bb.21-32 in Ex.2.23 indicate one ought to, it emerges that bb.21-23 is rhythmically identical to the unit used three times in bb.24-26, bb.27-29, and bb.30-32. This unit follows the syncopation pattern B-A-C. It does differ harmonically in bb.22-23, with the β shape being played rather than the γ shape, but the rhythms are identical, and moreover, the double-upper-pedal is sounded on the downbeat of the last bar of the unit. So, bb.21-23 can be conceived together with the three three-bar vocal phrases, while also being considered part of the 'fake-repeat' of the introduction, thanks to the pivoting function of b.20.

The final two lines of the verse, 'in the breaking and the breathing of the water weeds while she was busy being free', are a little analytically clearer, but no less tied to scordatura. From b.20 to b.32, Mitchell sings only C#, B and A#, all towards the bottom of her range, accompanied by the fourfold repetition of the rhythmic pattern discussed above. At the start of the next section, it is possible to assume that the previous pattern will continue, as b.33 is identical in the guitar part to bb.21, 24, 27, 30. This makes the contrast generated by the conjunction of Mitchell's ascent to a C# on the downbeat of b.34 and the guitar part suddenly shifting into the lower of the two high-string positions (not heard since b.16) very profound. This contrast is itself an ascent, to the guitar's pitch apex (bb.35-6), and to Mitchell's emphatically melismatic delivery of 'water weeds'. The melisma too is a contrast to the predominantly syllabic delivery in the main verse. Through this gestural weight, as well as the expectancy generated by the bottom literally dropping out of the texture, bb.33-38 forms a deeply emphatic climax which is *harmonically and structurally unresolved*. The required resolution is achieved to the brief refrain, 'while she's so busy being free', through something which as yet has been withheld from this song, namely the progression

directly from β to α to γ (bb.39-41), with γ landing on the extended turnaround gesture.

In this chapter I have further demonstrated the degree to which Mitchell's formal tendencies, in particular the use of extended (i.e. rhythmically irregular) phrases for local emphasis as well as for the generation of structural weight, are both supported and sublimated by the textural and timbral implications of the way Mitchell approaches her open-tuning scordatura. The songs I have discussed up to this point have, however, all featured reasonably busy guitar parts, be that the constant quaver motion of 'I Had a King' or the inner rhythmic intricacies of 'Cactus Tree'. They fit, all four of them, in a kind of normative middle ground for Mitchell's early material. Indeed, these choices of song have in part aimed to demonstrate the variety of approaches that open scordatura can facilitate, enhance and encourage. Neither of the songs in Chapter 4, however, fit into this middle ground, and what Mitchell does with more extreme treatments of tunings is the subject of that chapter.

CHAPTER 4 - SCORDATURA, INTERVALS AND POETIC RESONANCE IN 'SONG TO A SEAGULL' AND 'NATHAN LA FRANEER'

I have now analysed four songs: 'Cactus Tree', 'Marcie', 'I Had a King' and 'Michael from Mountains'. In analysing these songs a variety of different recurring patterns has been recognised, such as the prevalence of open pedals and scordatura-based sectional contrasts. 'Tropes', the word one would normally use to describe such recurrences, seems to me the wrong word to describe these things. A more appropriate term, I would suggest, is 'habits', or even 'things Mitchell likes to do with her guitar because they are encouraged by the tunings she uses'. To call them 'tropes' is to assign more intertextuality to these facets of Mitchell's style than is appropriate. Her stylistic choices are physically motivated, and they relate to other guitar-use only by avoiding too much similarity with it (Marom and Mitchell, 2014, pp.75-6). Although a fine distinction, this is quite crucial. Furthermore, I would reiterate that there are not 'essential' characteristics of individual tunings which determine the music which is produced in them. Yet the constraints of the instrument and the scordatura which 'edit' its capabilities and its best-optimised elements have a vast effect on the music produced through and with it. It is best, then, to return to the idea of a kind of feedback loop. The instrument is re-tuned, edited to some kind of departure-point of interest. This might be an odd chord or a tuning designed to optimise a distinctive picking pattern. It might be many other things too. It functions to optimise or permit, to make convenient or timbrally distinctive some particular way of playing the instrument. And in writing, the instrument's presence is felt, guiding what 'works', what is effective. In Chapter 4 I discuss two of the more extreme examples of this, first

in 'Song to a Seagull', in which the harmonic and gestural language moves worlds away from the triadic language which even Mitchell sometimes employs, and then in 'Nathan la Franeer', where Mitchell experiments with playing *against* the tuning.

(1) 'SONG TO A SEAGULL'

In the album's title track, the ninth on the record, scordatura becomes quite challenging to wrap up neatly. There are many ambiguous facets to the guitar part of this song, ambiguous in the sense that the productive-sonic link is less blatant. The timbral distinctions, for example, in 'Marcie' are obviously tied to moments where the manner of instrumental usage alters, where open shapes are traded for barre chords. In 'Song to a Seagull' these structural delineations are rather different.

Despite the relative lack of immediate clarity with regard to the tuning, scordatura remains deeply tied to the harmonic language, the rhythms and the form of the song. To define this, taking a broader view of 'Song to a Seagull' is necessary. The song presents a few curious elements right away. The extraordinarily broad *tessitura* of the guitar part and the way it justifies some curious harmonic-formal practices is the first of these. The second is the profound flat-wards tendency of the song and its curious modal implications, all of which proceed and are tied into the first element. The third and last is the off-kilter 9-bar phrase units, an example of a phenomenon already discussed in other songs. I shall discuss them in turn. Ex.2.25 shows the tuning in use, while Ex.2.26 shows a transcription of the whole song.

The broad guitar *tessitura* is first a kind of canvas. The CGCGCC tuning allows for widely spaced voicings which make the very broad arpeggiation patterns quite smooth. In some ways this song is a more obvious example than any of Mitchell's interest in fourths-based structures. This takes place throughout the song, beginning in the introduction. An open-fifth C chord changes to a 3-note quartal voicing, simply by sliding the G-C upper fourth down to F and B-flat. This is the sort of thing that turns up in the middle of textures in Mitchell's guitar parts all of the time, but less frequently does it present itself as the 'melodic' feature of her playing. Another element of the

Ex.2.25 - 'Song to a Seagull' Tuning



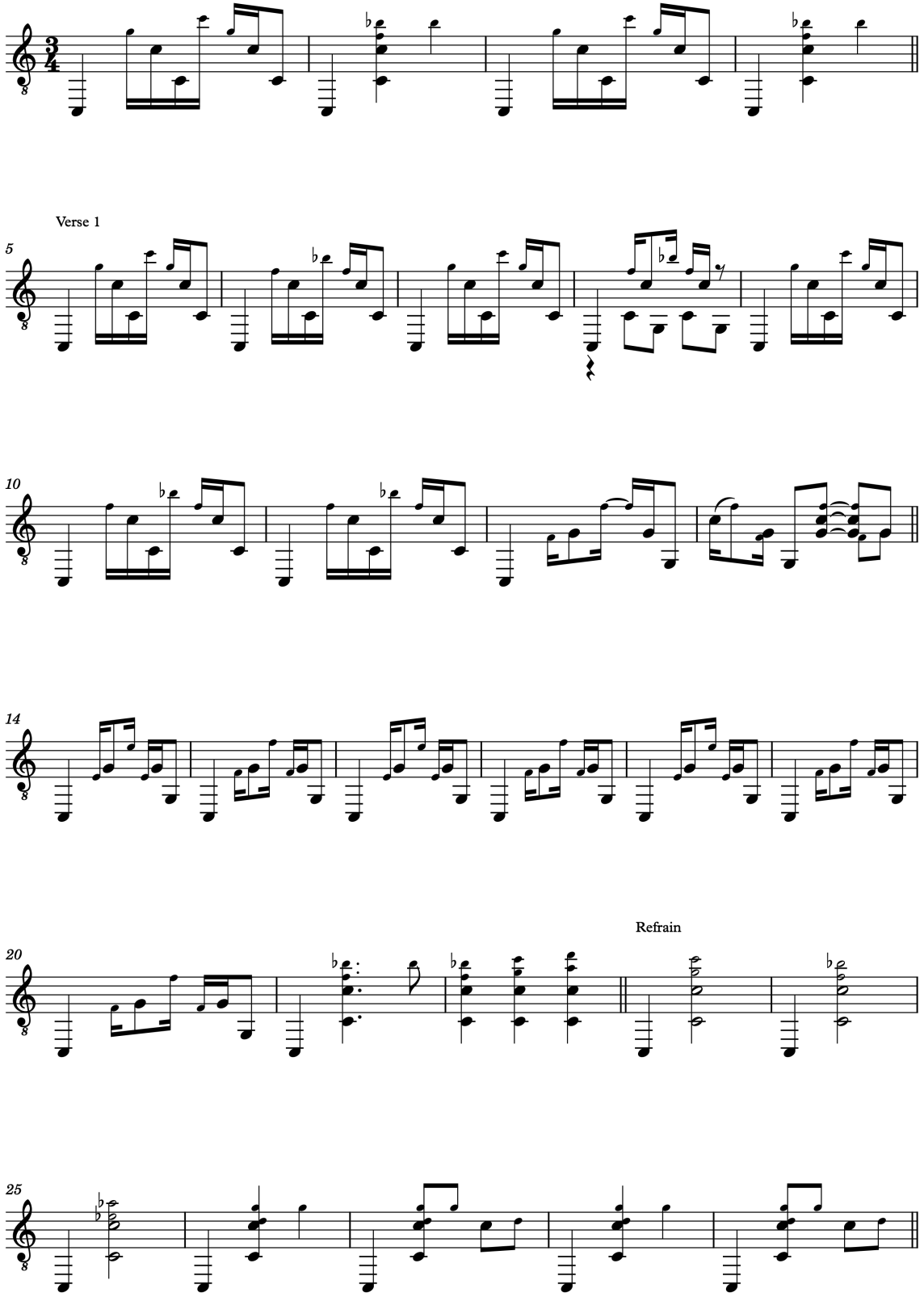
confluence of scordatura and *tessitura* that is of marked importance in the song is that it provides the ability easy to sustain quite monumental, broadly spaced sonorities in the refrain. This in turn allows the busy picking pattern to dissipate, leaving the listener with a kind of tolling as Mitchell intones: 'my dreams with the seagulls fly, out of reach, out of cry'. It is something of a narrative turn, a sort of recitative-refrain, an elegiac breathing-point. Yet it would be at the least rather different, and probably somewhat weak and under-emphatic, were this moment to involve closer-spaced versions of the same harmonies, played likewise on a guitar.[46] It would not succeed in conjuring the solemnity of the alienation Mitchell is depicting.

Breadth of general *tessitura* has another very useful by-product for the musician. It allows one to change registers within that wide palette, to great contrasting effect. The contrast between the first 9-bar units in the first (bb.5-13) and second (bb.30-38) verses is a particular example of this. The first is played high up on the neck, in a two-finger shape at the twelfth and tenth frets. The second is played around the fifth to the eighth, with similarly simple shapes. The contrast here is, of course, also harmonic, and I would contend that it is part of Mitchell's 'strategy' to employ different harmonic colours in conjunction with subtle shifts in timbre and *tessitura* at this point. This harmonic colour-contrast is quite a simple one, too: the first verse 'slides' in fourths' while the second 'slides' in major thirds. The first verse 'slides' down then up, while the

[46] This is yet another instance where the timbre-harmony-instrument complex is crucial to the efficacy of a musical moment. I could imagine closed voicings at this moment being highly successful were one to arrange this song in a modern synth-pop style. Buzzing Fender Rhodes piano and digitally processed vocals, a touch of soft strings, all panned widely around the lead vocal, all in the same register: this might have quite a powerful effect. It would not be at all the same though, and none of its success would be plausible on a guitar.

second 'slides' up then down. It is a rather efficient way of producing difference and contrast within the context of the same tune and the same rhythmic structure. There is, I would suggest, something to be learned about the way Mitchell views harmony here. Elsewhere in the album, the same tune will get the same guitar part, the same harmony. Yet here, the second verse uses different chords than the other three verses. More curious is the point that it is not especially memorable that this happens. It is noticeable and emphatic, but the song basically 'works' without this shift in language. So, substituting sliding fourths for sliding thirds may be a highly sublimated act of minor variation within Mitchell's harmonic language. To me, this rather indicates that she views the *act of sliding* as far more characteristic of the harmony than the individual intervallic structures. This is quite profound, as the second verse, though subtle, also has important modal implications within the song in its introduction of E flat and D flat. This sleight-of-hand moment is tied also to the tuning. The same pedal Cs persist in verse two as verse one (although occasionally on the 'other' high C string), and it is notable that Mitchell also adds a pedal G in the second verse, grounding the rather dark flat-side thirds-motion for which no conventional preparation has been made. However, some more subtle forms of preparation for this shift to a tertiary language are employed. The *second* 9-bar unit of the first verse (bb.14-22) is actually 'slid' in *octaves,* an oscillation between E and F. This does introduce a measure of conventional third-driven logic, but not in the same fashion as the second verse by any means. It is, itself, also a species of this kind of interchangeability. The sliding, the 'shape' of the segment, these are far more important facets than the 'actual notes'. It is a gesturally-motivated and scordatura-enabled harmonic logic which is at play here, from the sliding passages of the verse to the great tolling of the refrain. There are also broad formal/modal ways in which the use of thirds has an impact on the song which I will discuss in full in the foregoing.

Ex.2.26 - 'Song to a Seagull' Transcription




Verse 2
30
36
41
Refrain
47
Verse 3/4
50
57


62
68
Refrain
74
1.
molto rit..
82
85

We have seen how conventional parallel-third voice leading emerges in this song, how it was justified, how it cohered with the harmonic/instrumental logic at play. So, what conditions are required for 'tonal' voice-leading to become so quickly an agent of *contrast*? To begin with, the use of quartal voice-leading is established as the governing feature of the song from the second beat of the second bar when F and B-flat are first heard. It is more heavily developed in the refrain, first heard bb.23-9, wherein the initial G-C fourth slides first to F-B-flat and then to E-flat-A-flat and finally to D-G, all against pedal Cs. This motion is both typical Mitchell and noteworthy in the registral foregrounding of the fourth. It is the highest portion of the instrumental texture and inescapably melodic. It also enforces quite explicitly a non-Ionian sphere for the song. I say non-Ionian rather than any particular mode, as it shifts throughout. Mixolydian, Dorian, Aeolian and Phrygian pitches are heard in the course of the music.

The Phrygian in particular is of significance in this song. It emerges only in the second verse as a kind of nadir of mood, in extreme concordance with the mood of the lyrics of the verse. The first and last verse basically are concerned with comparing Mitchell's self and the seagull, which functions as a kind of idealised form of the free self.[47] In the third verse Mitchell tries actively to become more like the seagull. Yet in the second, all there is is grief:

I came to the city - And lived like old Crusoe
On an island of noise - In a cobblestone sea
And the beaches were concrete - And the stars paid a light bill
And the blossoms hung false - On their store window trees

[47] This is a moment which ties into quite a wide range of literary and dramatic threads. The 'trapped' character idealises freedom by projecting a kind of essential freedom onto the image or body of a bird. It is perhaps most similarly embodied in the song 'Green Finch and Linnet Bird' from Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd,* where Joanna is singing to the birds in a bird-seller's cages, wondering how they feel still free enough to sing despite their incarceration, wishing that she might do so like them. The most famous example in literature would of course be Maya Angelou's 1969 autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings.*

My dreams with the seagulls fly - Out of reach out of cry

In confluence with these deeply disquieting images of the suffocation of the natural world and its replacement with artificiality and coldness, the extra flat emerges through the parallel thirds and the Phrygian D-flat. This is the only moment these colours are employed in the song, a point which bears some reiteration. Recall also that a *textural* contrast is made at this point, with Mitchell playing in a distinct position on the neck from where other portions of the song have been played, higher than some and far lower than others. What arises from all of these alterations between verses is a subtle shift between analogous harmonic 'languages' as a means of emphasising a particular localised mood without disrupting the strophic surface of the music.

This profound and yet integrated mood-distinction is not essentially at odds with strophic song, and indeed is the most interesting part of the task of the arranger of such songs.[48] Yet Mitchell is not really 'arranging' per se. A better analogue might be the sudden D major verse in 'Gute Nacht' from "Winterreise", otherwise staunchly glued to a plodding D minor. Schubert achieves through that particular mood shift a kind of crooning and overweening obsessiveness, which is hardly Mitchell's goal here, but there are similarities of methodology. The melodic contour and rough harmony in the major verse of 'Gute Nacht' remains the same, with (mostly) simply a few minor chords changing to major ones. In other words, there is a change in 'colour' to change mood. In making these sorts of comparisons, the goal is to illustrate a sense in which 'form' as a concept in analysis might remain useful even in this context of music which is not necessarily subject to the compositional and ontological presumptions of most music analysis conducted throughout the discipline's history. The value lies in exactly the kind of comparisons I am making: it is useful to illustrate the kinds of formal

[48] The range of colours employed in Benjamin Britten's arrangement of the folk song 'The Trees they Grow so High' is a particularly clear example of this phenomenon.

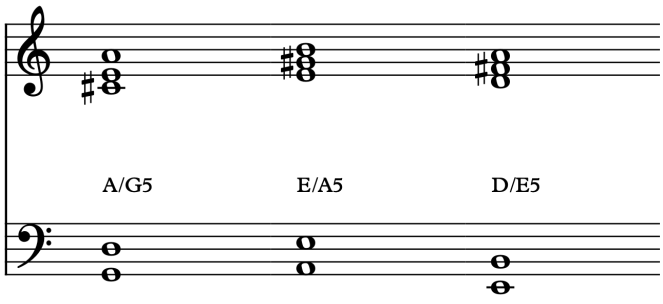
effects produced, the kinds of formal goals reached, by means of analogue. It may even be essential, as the availability of presumed analytical skills to discuss the kinds of factors which Mitchell 'manipulates', the parameters she stretches and from which 'form' might emerge, is limited. My solution, when it has been necessary, has been to consider moments where similar formal 'goals' are achieved through manipulation of those parameters whose use analysis has been predominantly concerned with. In short, gently shaping the understanding of the analytically unfamiliar with a jumping-off point in the familiar.

Continuing with the analytically unfamiliar, Mitchell's tendency to 'play' with musical time is again on full display in this song. The verses, in short, are in nine-bar units. They are not even especially easy to sub-divide, as one could parse them as 4+5 or as 6+3, or even perhaps as 4+4+1. It probably does not matter overmuch which perspective is adopted, as they illustrate the same goal, the 'stretching' of time. To discuss this, a closer inspection is required. Microcosmically, these nine-bar units are comprised of two two-bar phrases followed by a slightly more ambiguous construction, where the sense of the lyrics runs on over the phrase group. This ambiguity is furthered by the fact that Mitchell adds the 'extra' bar in bar 7 of the excerpt, and she does so by 'prolonging' the quartal sus4 chord, and emphasises it further by 'looping' the vocal line through a descending scale fragment on 'blame you, for sun on your wings'. The rhythmic emphasis placed on the eighth and ninth bars of the segment through the syncopation and in bar nine the prominent hammer-on figure, as well as the V^7 harmony, makes them sit very much as though they were part of a more conventional 2+2+2+2 phrase-scheme. Yet they are not. These subtle shifts do not feel 'hidden' but rather 'justified', at least to my ear. There is, and I cannot find a better word, a stretchiness to this music, much as there is in other songs on the album. It suits the expansively elegiac tone of the lyric, too. It would be a little too motoric to sing this

song without these 'extra' bars. Furthermore, the 'tolling' of the refrain would, I suspect, be very much less well integrated into the whole without these more subtle moments of stretching occurring throughout the song.

It is incumbent upon me to note just how badly this song works if one plays it on the piano exactly as Mitchell plays it on the guitar. It loses something, and that something is, in key respects, the sound of the scordatura. All of the tolling, the washing, the blending-together of notes a tone apart, these characteristics get rather broken-up, made choppy and overly particular without the cocoon of an enveloping open tuning. So bizarre would it be that I cannot imagine writing it. This conceptual implausibility is furthered by the immense degree of nuance the open scordatura offers Mitchell. The left hand has almost nothing difficult to do in this entire album. The easy and the convenient encourages the subtle and the appropriate, it brings out the adaptive and responsive in the musician. In short, when one plays this song in its original tuning, one is unlikely to be worrying about the notes and can actually make music. I have largely asserted this conceptual implausibility aspect up to this point, so some further explanation is in order, explanation particularly suited to this song. The contrast between Mitchell's quartal and quintal writing between the guitar and the piano can be summarised quite simply. In short, when Mitchell writes 'in fourths' (or fifths) at the piano, she writes in fourths and fifths like a pianist. Specifically, there are

Ex.2.27 - 'Blue' Quintal Voicings



fairly clear traces, as I mention earlier in the thesis, of the pianists of Miles Davis' two Great Quintets of the 1950s and 1960s.[49] The main characteristic of this is the closed-position major triad in the right hand over a different open fifth, usually one which produces a five-note voicing, as in Ex.2.27. These are, basically, very 'pianistic' voicing choices. They are 'nicely' spaced, they do not place undue weight on highly dissonant intervals like minor ninths. These kinds of quintal voicings are good 'choices' for the piano. The first chord contains an unbroken set of 3 fifths above the low G, though the E is below the A. The second voicing only has two, while the third has two fifths (B and F#) and two fourths (A and D) above the E. In isolation this seems a bit trivial, but Mitchell plays several sequences of these chords, or pedal points involving the upper stratum (the right hand), over the course of the song. The point of this brief excursion is essentially that Mitchell's harmonic choices, even when she is concerned with a particular colour, such as 'quartal', are deeply instrumentally-concerned, be they on the piano or the guitar.

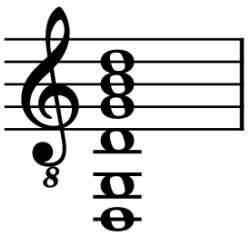
[49] The pianists in question are Red Garland, Bill Evans and Herbie Hancock. The latter in particular is known for popularising precisely the sorts of voicings Mitchell uses at the piano in 'Blue', both in his work with Davis and afterwards.

(2) 'NATHAN LA FRANEER'

My final major case study in the album is the song 'Nathan la Franeer'. This song, the final part of the first half of the album, is the point in the very loose narrative of the record where Mitchell escapes from the city. It feels, despite the relatively inconsequential nature of the events recounted, like some sort of Hollywood chase scene, which is rather appropriate, as it quite explicitly deals with leaving Los Angeles. The scene of this chase is a taxi cab. The antagonist is the eponymous driver. It is quite different from other songs on the record, especially with regard to the particular focus with which I will discuss it. It is in 'Nathan la Franeer' that Mitchell employs the synthetic potential of the voice and the guitar in the most distinctive and even dramatic fashion. Dissonance is not a decorative or sublimated property in this song but rather something more ingrained and foregrounded. Mitchell can reasonably be said to play *against the tuning*, in that she plays *with* it in two distinct ways and then against one another. But 'dissonance' is not confined to the guitar part but rather exists within the vocal itself. This synthesis of internal dissonances in the two instruments is remarkable in its cumulative effect: the dramatic tension it produces is highly appropriate to the narrative position the song occupies. It is the point of furthest remove.

In the lyric, the dissonance is quite palpable, both in terms of meaning and imagery and the very sound of the words. The first line of the second verse, 'the cars and buses bustled through the bedlam of the day', is the prime example:. The b's and s's repeated in quick succession have a jarring sound. So too does the line 'the city grated thru chrome-plate', this one emphasised by 'bad' scansion (the emphasis lands on plate, which it really ought not to were it not for the obvious goal of creating a jarring and desolate sonic environment), so deliberate in its weightiness. There are too many consonants. There are also too many people, all of them crammed together. There is also a relentlessness to the text of the song which Mitchell inculcates quite

Ex.2.28 - 'Nathan la Franeer' Tuning



subtly through various means, notably caesura in the first verse. Really the first four ‘lines’ are one thought, strung breathlessly together: ‘I hired a coach to take me from confusion to the plane, and though we shared a common space I know I’ll never meet again the driver, with his eyebrows furrowed in the rear-view mirror. I read his name and it was plainly written: Nathan la Franeer’. Presented as prose, it rather reads like a 19th century novel, complete with unnecessary synchesis for emphatic weight on the word ‘driver’. It is not a regular characteristic of Mitchell to write lyrics which read as prose so easily. There is, in other words, a point to this, namely the aforementioned breathless relentlessness. There is a profound need to escape present in the text of this song, even down to the sound of the words. Yet this pales in comparison to the impact it has in conjunction with the guitar part and the melody. There is an inexorable quality to this rather bustling song which is essentially the product of the consonant-heavy vocal, its meaning, its rhythmic looseness, and some scordatura-enabled elements of the guitar writing.

Ex.2.28 shows the tuning used in 'Nathan la Franeer' while Ex.2.29 shows the first verse of the song with the 4-bar introduction. At the outset I note a few things about the transcription. Firstly, that the vocal line has been transcribed here with a focus on clarity, rather than attempting to quantify the very loose delivery Mitchell employs: too much detail might be somewhat obfuscatory here. Secondly, the guitar part has been notated with thumb-notes in the second voice and finger-notes in the

first, which corresponds to the treble-bass alternation within the part and so ought to aid rhythmic and harmonic clarity. Thirdly, as with previous transcriptions, stopped notes have small noteheads.

The harmonic implications of the tuning in 'Nathan la Franeer' are largely held in common with 'Marcie'. The ends they are put towards, however, are different. The opportunities for modal ambiguity through stopping the B string and playing B-flat on one of the many G or D strings are exploited here, just as they are in 'Marcie', though in quite different ways. Whereas in 'Marcie' it is B-flat major sixth chords that provide this initial ambiguity, here Mitchell uses a number of different harmonies which introduce this modal blurring. First among these is a partial voicing of Gm^{7add11} at bb.2, 4 and 6. The second is B-flat major in b.10, emphasised in contrast through the full-barre at the third fret. Thirdly, in a widely-spaced G minor triad, bb.14, 20, 22 and 23. Fourth, as the fifth of a full-barre E-flat major at the eighth fret bb.21, an even more clearly contrasted moment (timbrally speaking, in particular) than the B-flat major in b.10.

I have not noted this rather exacting collection of B-flats simply for the sake of taxonomic satisfaction. Indeed, each of these B-flats holds some kind of structural purpose. The first kind, the Gm^{11} arrives to introduce the core modal ambiguities of the song in the introduction. It is approached in characteristic Mitchell fashion by means of the sliding- fourth-and-pedal pattern. Here, the progression consists of a dominant (D) pedal with upper structures of G^{sus4} and something that I would describe as Gm^{7add11}. This is best viewed as a move from a modally undefined 'fourths' tonic to a minor tonic with some decoration, standard elements of Mitchell's harmonic language all, deeply ingrained in the possibilities of this tuning, and not dissimilar to the opening progression of 'I Had a King'. The second kind of B-flat is an agent of contrast even in comparison to the first B-flat. The vocal enters at b.5 and has a 4-bar

Ex.2.29 - 'Nathan la Franeer' First Verse Transcription




13
I asked him would he hur – ry but we crawled the can-yons slow–ly thru the buy-
16
– ers and the sel-lers and the bur-glar bells, and the wi – shing wells
19
With gangs and gir – ly shows the ghos-tly gar – den grows.
23

phrase, which begins with the introductory I - i progression, bb.5-6. This is varied bb.9-10 at the second vocal phrase by the progression from I^{7sus4} to bIII. The common-tone progression (F and D are common in both of these progressions) is thus reinterpreted, with a significantly marked timbral variation in conjunction with the harmonic one. The third species of B-flat continues this process of variation. Where the first two kinds of B-flat have been heard in the second bar of 4-bar vocal entries, the third species arrives with the vocal entry in b.14 (both being delayed by a kind of breath-catching, time-stretching bar of the sort discussed in several other songs, which in this case is notably not absent of harmonic tension, due to the added ninth: the song must keep at least some tension going, given the subject). The timbre of the chord changes yet again here: different strings are stopped, and those which are stopped are stopped further up the neck, while the thumb's off-beat crosses over with the open-string portion of the syncopated finger-line. Furthermore, the harmony in the first half of b.14 is a G minor chord without decoration of any sort. This is somewhat bold given that it is only the fourth undecorated triad heard in the song, after a IV - I progression in b.8 and the B-flat major chord in b.10.[50] It is also more widely spaced than the other B-flat moments. With these characteristics it is eminently suited to its role: heralding a major structural moment. The first two instances of B-flat have corresponded to a neat pair of quasi-periodic phrases. This chord, on the other hand, begins a long phrase which carries the listener to the apex of tension and of melody in b.21, where the fourth species of B-flat use, the E-flat major chord, is heard. Here, the B-flat is also in the voice, higher in register than the first two phrases or indeed much of the third, longer, phrase. It is also the moment that the music 'slows': the D major chord which follows on the third beat is itself followed by a beat of instrumental silence, broken only by a vocal anacrusis. So, the climax is built up through four different kinds of

[50] One might even reasonably view the IV chord in b.8 as a prolonged double appoggiatura, as it is in second inversion. To do so would strengthen my point yet further, but I do view it as a kind of IV chord.

instrumental B-flat, joined only at the last by the voice, each timbrally distinct and harmonically differentiated, reaching the maximum point of harmonic distance in the song, the major chord on the flatted sixth at the point of greatest emphasis. This is of course the same harmony on which the 'cascade' in 'Marcie' began. They are almost sister-songs. Both paint portraits, yet while 'Marcie' is sympathetic, if bitter, 'Nathan la Franeer' is hectic, angry, and vicariously quite alarming.

There is one final use of B-flat in this song in 'Open G', which is 'set-up' by the preceding instances. The final line of the verse, 'the ghostly garden grows', is sung over the same G minor shape as was first heard in b.14. The picking pattern is more heavily syncopated than previously, however, heralding one last harmonic twist of the knife that is the stopped B-flat and the open B, in b.23. Here, the B *natural* sounds like the dissonance, and this for two reasons. First, the B-flat has been emphasised subtly and gradually throughout the song. Secondly, Mitchell plucks it rather hard and there is a sort of snapping sound to the attack as it pierces through the texture in such a way as to seem out-of-place: it becomes timbrally dissonant, in short.

The synthesis of this process of emphatic B-flats with the textually dissonant vocal line is another crucial structural element of the song. The first thing to note about this tune is the prevalence of stretches of repeated notes. Major examples of this are to be found bb.5, 7, 9 and 11. The second salient point to this structure is the total absence of melisma until the word 'wells' (bb.18-9), which places rather a lot of emphasis on that word, and indeed on the only other melisma, that on 'shows'. Thirdly, the phrase 'with gangs and girly shows' is sung suddenly in a much higher register than the rest of the verse. Fourthly, as previously mentioned, the vocal line does not strike B-flat until b.21, despite the prevalence of it at key moments in the guitar part. The second, third and fourth of these play quite directly into the 'reveal' of the B-flat over the E-flat major chord in b.21 through the introduction of new elements into the

texture and a more sustained vocal sound not broken up by the barrage of consonants which characterises parts of this song. They have a measure of tension-building effect on their own, but coupled with the harmony (particularly the 3-2-1 descent from the relative minor at b.18) and the bustling guitar part form a significant emphatic structure. As for the first aspect, the repeated notes, much might be made of a) how constricted they are in terms of phrase-range, and b) how they permit, or even encourage, the use of many words: it is easier to sing many words to one or two notes quickly than to do so to many notes. There is an instrumental sensitivity to Mitchell's own voice at play here, too. There are also many, many, consonants in these words to the first two phrases of the song. This effect is even more profound in the second verse, though, in particular at the line 'the cars and buses bustled thru the bedlam of the day'.

This final pair of case-studies has demonstrated how Mitchell employs the synthesis of timbral and harmonic logic which scordatura brings to the fore in more heightened and pronounced ways, namely the fifth-centric structures and gestures of 'Song to a Seagull' and the bitter dissonance *against* the tuning of 'Nathan la Franeer'. In these more heightened instances of scordatura-dictated logic, the poetic resonance alluded to in this chapter's title is more readily seen than in the first four songs discussed. The bustling business of 'Nathan la Franeer', in particular, aligns with the hectic and panicked narrative Mitchell tells in the song, while what I might describe as a serene mournfulness in 'Song to a Seagull' is present in both text and guitar part. I have also noted the structural role of some of these instances of playing *against* the tuning in the form of the quasi-totemic B-flats in 'Nathan la Franeer'. I would stress once more the totally different harmonic languages, gestural choices, moods and approaches to contrast employed *in the same tuning* between 'Nathan la Franeer' and 'Marcie'. The tuning does not determine so much as suggest, and given a rather

different goal in terms of mood (mournful in 'Marcie' as opposed to panicked and angry in 'Nathan la Franeer'), it might suggest different things, bringing us back to the feedback loop.

CONCLUSION

This thesis, I hope, is a proof of concept. The concept is simply that foregrounding the importance of instrumental concerns can lead to an enrichment of some musical analysis. However, the case studies, and indeed the artist, that I selected to show this do some of the heavy-lifting for me. The influence of scordatura is a particularly profound instrumental concern. The question thus remains as to how such an approach might be brought to bear on other music than *Song to a Seagull*. To do so, I will attempt to extrapolate some guiding principles, based at first on the 'habits' I have shown in the course of this thesis. These 'habits' are best given as a list.

1. The use of an open pedal (and sometimes multiple pedals) against which fretted 'shapes' or 'substrates' move in similar motion. This is found at both large and small scales. An example of the former is the descent chords in 'Marcie'. An example of the latter would be the 4-bar introduction to 'I Had a King'.

2. The use of the guitar texture to create and sublimate temporally asymmetrical forms, as just discussed with regard to 'Cactus Tree'. In 'I Had a King' this is achieved through the establishment of two conflicting processes which are *both* supported by the guitar part. In 'Marcie' it is achieved through the hypnotic repeatability of the timbral 'home' of the open G chord played in a gently lulling pattern.

3. The use of scordatura-integrated timbral *contrasts* to emphasise structural and sectional delineations. This occurs in all the songs I have analysed thus far in some sense.

4. The coupling of (3) with a chromatic descent passage from some point of tonal remove, timbrally removed also, back to the tonic. This is most notable in 'Marcie' and 'Michael from Mountains'.

From these 'habits', I would argue that there are several things which might be usefully sought after when analysing other music. Two stand out in particular, the first being the general confluence of timbral and harmonic 'logic' at a sectional and even stylistic level, or, in other words, the association of a kind of harmony with 'a sound'. An example of this outside Mitchell's work might be the general tendency in jazz guitar playing toward 'cleaner' electric guitar sounds, which permit/encourage the kind of complex chords that characterise that style.[51]A contrasting example would be the tendency towards single-note lead lines in heavy metal guitar solos, which, although based, as Robert Walser has shown, in a kind of Neoclassicism (Walser, 1993), is in part due to the lack of clarity which ensues when playing too many notes simultaneously with the same level of distortion. Metal, in particular, is an interesting back-and-forth example of the feedback loop. If we consider the sound of the genre essentially tied to distorted electric guitars, a number of choices in its standard instrumentation follow on in a way. The sound of metal rhythm guitar, in particular, has a major implication, in that the low-register power chords influence *how the bass has to be played*. Heavy metal bassists very frequently double the guitar at a lower octave rather than playing an independent line for the simple reason that if they played a more intricate counterpoint it would be both inaudible and very 'muddy'. Similarly, the tendency to play with a pick among metal bassists perhaps has as much to do with the 'brightness' that doing so imparts, compared to playing with fingers, as it does the speed of the notes in the part. One could argue that this is a kind of stylistic decision,

[51] There are, of course, a great many jazz guitarists who play with plenty of distortion, but it is in almost all cases *a feature*, particularly for the most notable example of this choice, John Schofield.

yet I would contend that metal, in its more standardised forms, works the way it does *because* of this doubling which is in part caused by the style of rhythm guitar playing. One might also argue that the tendency towards very high tenor vocals in classic metal records has timbral and arranging benefits that suggest its interpenetration with the style of guitar playing, benefits that are quite straightforward: the guitar plays low, so the singer sings high, and thus can be heard. So, from the simple stylistic decision or idea of fast and low power chords on a distorted guitar proceed suggestions for both the bassist and the singer. This simple decision is therefore tied into the whole style.

The second thing which I would translate from this analysis of *Song to a Seagull* is the confluence of timbral and harmonic contrast at moments of structural delineation, and even the pure use of timbral contrast for this purpose.[52] This, I would argue, is something that is not often given adequate analytical weight even in cases in the Western Classical Tradition where it would be enriching. It might extend, too, beyond the somewhat hackneyed topic-based implications of trumpet fanfares, horn calls and the cor anglais sounding 'plaintive'. It might instead encompass such things as the relationship of double basses to celli in a large orchestral work or the register of the piano in which an accompaniment is played. The lento introduction of Rachmaninov's Op.19 Cello Sonata is an example of this where a wide variety of registrally-defined instrumental colours are employed, particularly in bb.9-12 where the sustained inner textural stratum is a combination of pedalled piano chords in octave doublings and the cello part, while the *outer* portion of the texture is simultaneous high and low staccato notes in the piano, which themselves will sustain as well as altering the colour of the sustained piano chords unless played with a single-note sustaining pedal, a device which although standard on modern concert

[52] This sort of purely-timbral contrast is of course most commonly found in electronic dance music of various kinds, but in a strange generic interpenetration has begun to find its way into instrumental popular music. The boldest example of this is the funk cover band Scary Pockets' series of 'funk remixes', where instead of covering the song in a traditional way, they treat it in the same manner in which an EDM producer might remix a pop song. This might provide an interesting source of analysis for instrumentally-bound contrasts in pure timbre.

instruments was not in especially common use at the date of composition. The following phrase completes the example of instrumentally-defined timbral contrast, as the piano descends mostly below middle C while the cello switches register and is by the end of b.15 playing a sixth above the highest piano note in the held chord. So, timbre, with or without a concerted link to harmony, is an agent of contrast far beyond *Song to a Seagull*. I might suggest, furthermore, to any readers wishing to pursue this analytical angle with regard to music of the Western Classical Tradition that chamber music involving the cello and the piano might be a particularly rich area upon which to focus, due to the wide registral and timbral compasses these two instruments possess.

Having demonstrated these two basic tenets, that instrumental concerns and timbral choices inform style and that timbre is a profound agent of contrast worthy of both independent and integrated analytical attention, we need something to analyse. One could start by analysing music that bears some similarity to *Song to a Seagull*. The best way of doing this would be with the rest of Mitchell's early work. I make mention in this thesis of 'The Gallery', a song from her second record, *Clouds,* as well as noting the distinction in fifths-based harmonic language between 'Song to a Seagull' and 'Blue' on the basis of their instrumental concerns. One might analyse a great many of the songs from these early albums based on their instrumental parameters, including those written for the piano. I would argue that a thorough consideration of Mitchell's piano-based writing in comparison to her guitar-based writing would bear a great deal of analytical fruit.

Another place where this sort of analysis might bear fruit is in the work of the litany of songwriters who profess themselves profoundly influenced by Mitchell. In particular, among her modern 'descendants', such artists as Jesca Hoop, Adrianne Lenker and This Is The Kit might provide interesting case-studies. I argue this on the basis of their tendency to explore non-traditional formal approaches, as well as their

idiosyncratic approaches to the guitar. Hoop, in particular, experiments with very large-scale formal devices by 'pop-song' standards. A particularly intricate example would be 'Bed Across the Sea' from her 2009 record *Hunting my Dress*. Adrianne Lenker, on the other hand, is particularly given to open tunings, potentially providing a kind of historical and comparative analytical angle in contrasting her approach to Mitchell's.

Neither of these 'next-steps' is particularly adventurous, given the major similarities both possess to the music in *Song to a Seagull*. One might instead look for instances where, like Mitchell, a musician possesses a 'characteristic' or 'unique' instrumental approach. Remaining focussed on the guitar might provide a useful start here, as there are many such musicians. One might analyse the music of The Smiths through the lens of Johnny Marr's guitar parts, which are notoriously difficult and also distinct from other guitar music of the 1980s through the relative lack of distortion and the near-total absence of guitar solos. As I have noted, heavy metal itself might also be a worthy case-study from an instrumental-timbral perspective.

In this concluding section I have suggested some ways in which a material-analytical approach to music might be further developed. Whatever form further study in this area may take, I would argue that it is essential to retain focus upon three things. Firstly, I would suggest that analyses in particular might be enriched by generating a list of 'habits' of a particular musician or indeed a style as I have done at the start of this conclusion, perhaps bringing personal musical style and individual tracks and moments into closer dialogue. Secondly, it will in my view remain essential to focus on the confluence of instrumental concerns and style, a link of whose generality I hope I have given some evidence in this chapter. Thirdly, I would stress the general relevance of, at the very least, the possibility of timbre being used as a structural and contrasting agent.

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